



SENATOR JOSÉ MENÉNDEZ DISTRICT 26

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Senator José Menéndez Issues Statement on Vote for State Budget

San Antonio, Texas – Senator José Menéndez issues statement after voting “No” on the CS HB 1, the state budget.

Senator José Menéndez released the following statement:

Having a historic \$32.7 Billion surplus provided us a tremendous opportunity. We had the ability to make needed investments in areas that have been historically underfunded, in addition to strategic funding that could improve the lives of millions of Texans.

It is difficult to vote for a plan that has about \$5.35 Billion wrapped up in bills that have not yet passed, including half a Billion tax dollars that are earmarked for ESA’s aka vouchers. Our Foundation School Program is \$8.8 Billion less than last session, in spite of the surplus. Aside from the minimal increase in the basic allotment, contingent upon passage of another bill still in conference, there are no provisions outlining the possibility for teacher pay raises.

There are additional concerns about our financial support of school safety and student well-being this session. We are on the horizon of a loss of Federal Elementary and Secondary School Emergency Relief (ESSER) funding from the pandemic. Our schools have relied on over \$19 Billion in ESSER funding over the last 3 years, providing the ability for groups like Communities in Schools to provide wrap-around services to our students. This funding allowed for flexibility after the horrific mass shooting at Robb Elementary, to shift resources to the community the next day. The loss of ESSER funds combined with no increase in funding from the state leaves 441 campuses at risk of losing services. This, along with a possible \$0.28 cent increase to the school safety allotment will not bridge the gap for schools in my district to be in compliance with all of the additional school safety measures we are putting onto them.

Moreover, the budget declined to appropriate any sort of cost-of-living adjustment or extra paychecks this year for our state retirees who have worked decades for our great State in a variety of agencies and sectors. These retirees have not seen a cost of living adjustment since 2001.

Much of the money that could have been put into our public education system was instead used at the border. While border security is needed for our State, the amount allocated to border operations is disproportionately greater than what we allocate to our veterans, our schools, and other necessities. The State has already spent billions on the border. Furthermore, if HB 7 is signed, we will be allocating an additional estimated \$64 Million to the Texas Border Force when we have already been spending over \$4 billion on Operation Lone Star (and have diverted funds from other areas of the budget to do so).

Not only did our public education system incur losses, but so did our foster care system. The inclusion of Riders 42 and 44 would have allowed us to understand where improvements are needed in our system, which has been under a federal lawsuit for non-compliance for over a decade. Instead, the state allocated \$140 Million for the Alternatives to Abortion program, despite abortion being outlawed in this state. Substantive alternatives to abortion would be investing in our communities by funding our public education system, foster care rate modernization, and funding prevention and early intervention programs, so that we can keep families together in the first place. We are not funding the programs that have, time and time again, shown that they are in need.

CSHB 1 does not deliver in the way it needed to for our children, families, and teachers. Money for our public schools and teacher pay raises should not be held hostage contingent on passage of a contentious voucher bill. In the 86th session, we put them first by ensuring their pay raises in the basic allotment. Teachers could have had their raises guaranteed this session as well. In the coming school years, we shouldn't be surprised if there aren't enough teachers.

The wellness and safety of our children and teachers should not be contingent on anything. I voted no on the budget because we missed an opportunity to use this historic budget surplus in a way that helps all Texans especially those who need it most.

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