



**State Senator
Kirk Watson
District 14**

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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The following is a statement from Sen. Watson regarding adoption of the 2018-19 state budget:

The broad outlines of the 2018-19 state budget were drawn two years ago when the Legislature made short-sighted tax cuts and other decisions that severely reduced by \$9 billion the revenue needed to pay for education, health care and other basic state functions.

As a result, there's a lot not to like in the 2018-19 budget approved by the Texas Senate on Saturday.

I'm incredibly disappointed in the Legislature's inability to enact any real school finance reform. We're failing the schoolchildren of Texas as well as taxpayers by refusing to invest more in public education.

Senate Bill 1 also does far too little to respond to needs of severely disabled children who have lost access to critical therapies due to provider rate cuts in 2015. I don't understand the resistance to fully restoring this funding.

But as a member of the Senate Finance Committee, I served on work groups that helped to craft the budgets for Child Protective Services, mental health, health care, higher education and natural resources and was able to fight for specific investments that I believe makes this budget better for Texans.

Senate Bill 1 provides:

- An additional \$500 million for CPS — a 17 percent increase — as well as the authority to hire about 600 more employees. These resources should help the agency address the ongoing crisis created in part by astronomical turnover among caseworkers. Coming into the session, this was one of the highest priorities for me and I'm pleased we were able to make this difference.
- A \$300 million down payment toward rebuilding our state hospitals and bringing our mental health infrastructure into the 21st century. Austin State Hospital is among the facilities that must be replaced. Mental health was another priority for me and I anticipate ASH will receive planning money out of this appropriation allowing us to address the entire continuum of care here in Central Texas. This is a key step in having what I've called an MD Anderson of the Brain in Austin.
- Sufficient funding to avert a "death spiral" for TRS-Care, which provides health care for retired teachers;
- First-time formula funding for Dell Medical School at the University of Texas and stable funding for UT Austin. Our community is already realizing a return on its investment in Dell Medical School and this appropriation assures additional funding and success.
- Continuation of funding for flood monitoring and early warning systems, which stemmed from the 2015 Memorial Day floods, which had such an enormous impact on Senate District 14; and
- Repair and recovery money for state parks, such as Bastrop State Park, affected by disasters.

By those measures, I can support Senate Bill 1.