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Schwertner Announces Public Health Measures to Protect Texans from Ebola, Other Infectious Diseases

Based on lessons learned from the Ebola crisis in Dallas, SB 538 makes a number of key changes to the way the state responds to dangerous infectious disease emergencies.

AUSTIN -- This morning, Senator Charles Schwertner (R-Georgetown) and members of the Senate Health and Human Services Committee held a press conference to announce SB 538, legislation that makes a number of key reforms to the way the state of Texas manages and responds to dangerous infectious disease outbreaks.

"Senate Bill 538 was developed to address some of the weaknesses in our public health response and ensure that the state of Texas is better prepared to protect its citizens moving forward," said Schwertner. "This bill represents the next step in protecting Texans against deadly infectious disease threats like Ebola, and we're not going to rest just because the crisis of the moment has abated."

These new public health measures come on the heels of the state's recent Ebola scare, following Thomas Eric Duncan's admission to Texas Presbyterian Hospital in Dallas and subsequent diagnosis as the first confirmed case of Ebola in the United States. While the disease was ultimately contained and a large-scale infection was avoided, the event sparked a new debate about the adequacy of the state's public health response measures and its preparedness to respond to similar infectious disease outbreaks in the future.

SB 538 was developed based upon recommendations of the Texas Task Force on Infectious Disease Preparedness and Response, a team of experts assembled by then-Governor Rick Perry to study the efficacy of Texas' public health infrastructure. The legislation establishes a clear command structure in future public health emergencies and guarantees hospitals, medical workers, and first responders have the necessary tools to effectively handle the next infectious disease outbreak.

"The bottom line is, protecting the public health and safety of Texas families is the highest responsibility of the state of Texas -- and I can assure you it is the highest possible priority of the members of the Senate Committee on Health and Human Services."

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