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Eckhardt Secures Amendment Protecting Critical Community Health Centers in Austin: “Public Policy is a Balancing Act, Dialogue Helps”

AUSTIN – This week, the Texas Senate passed Senator Brandon Creighton’s **SB 2623, restricting the placement of homeless service navigation centers near public schools**. The bill was prompted in part by concerns over the Sunrise Navigation Center in South Austin, which has been vital in connecting nearly 20,000 people to health, housing, and support services in 2024, but operates directly across from Joslin Elementary and neighborhood park.

Initially, Senator Eckhardt planned to oppose the bill due to its broad definition of navigation centers, which risked displacing essential health providers like **Central Health** and **Community Care**. However, she worked with Senator Creighton to amend the bill, narrowing its scope to exclude hospitals, affiliated clinics, and local mental and behavioral health authorities. Senator Creighton also accepted an amendment from **Senator Cesar Blanco** excluding chemical dependency treatment facilities. **These changes were crucial for Senator Eckhardt’s support.**

The amended bill preserves access to critical community health services while addressing concerns about the proximity of navigation centers to schools, aiming to ensure such services are placed in more appropriate locations.

Senator Eckhardt made the following statement about her amendment:

“The Sunrise Homeless Navigation Center has provided important support for people experiencing homelessness in our community for over a decade, but our community has spoken clearly. I believe the legislation as passed strikes a fairer balance for all parties, demonstrating dialogue’s essential role in the balancing act of public policy. **We must continue making critical investments into housing and infrastructure to end chronic homelessness in our community.** These efforts should include working with Sunrise to identify a new, more appropriate location for their important services.”

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Sarah Eckhardt is the third-term Democratic State Senator representing District 14, comprising Austin and surrounding areas. She serves on the Administration, Border Security, Nominations, and Veterans Affairs committees in the 89th Legislative Session, and has previously served on the Water, Agriculture, & Rural Affairs and Local Government committees. A proud UT Law and Public Affairs alum, Senator Eckhardt was the first woman to serve as Travis County Judge from 2014-2020.