

Testimony of Robert Borowski

Texas Impact

Public Hearing of the Senate Public Education Committee

March 31, 2011

Chair Shapiro and Committee Members:

Good afternoon. My name is Rob Borowski and I am a project director for Texas Impact.

Texas Impact was established in 1973 to be a voice of religious social concern in the public policy process. As a statewide religious grassroots network, Texas Impact's members include thousands of individuals, congregations, and governing bodies of the Christian, Jewish and Muslim faiths, as well as other faith communities

On behalf of Texas Impact, and the children and families of Texas, I want to thank Senator Shapiro for hearing SB 226. We encourage its passage.

Texas Impact supports SB 226 and the more efficient use of the Fitnessgram data to address the growing crisis of childhood obesity. SB 226 multiplies the usefulness and effectiveness of the data that we already collect, with a minor change to the reporting rules.

Children, and youth are among the populations with the highest rates of obesity, as reported in 2010 by Texas Health Institute and the Methodist Health Care Ministries.

According to the Centers for Disease Control the rate for obesity in adults has doubled, and in children has tripled, since 1980. In Texas the numbers are even more troubling. The Department of State Health Services found that nearly that 32 percent of Texas high school students were overweight or obese (2007), while 42% of all 4th graders and 39% of all 8th graders were either obese or overweight (2004-05).

Texas Impact's *Health and Strength and Daily Food* project is working to prevent childhood obesity by increasing access to healthy foods and physical activity through community advocacy. By creating partnerships with State, Federal, and local agencies we seek to promote better access to healthy foods, open natural spaces, and active recreational opportunities for Texas children. Lack of attention to these critical needs will cost Texas billions of dollars annually (\$15.6 billion in 2010 and \$39 billion by 2040 in obesity related costs alone, according to the Texas Interagency Obesity Council).

SB 226 will allow for better use of currently collected State of Texas data with very little additional effort and no additional cost. This change will provide for a much better tool in our efforts to understand and prevent this health crisis. While the schools and school districts are the primary collectors of this data, enhanced Fitnessgram information can provide tremendous benefit to the research institutes, universities, public health organizations, local governments, inter-agency committees, non-profit organizations, and faith communities that are working to address the obesity epidemic in Texas. In particular we think that SB 226 will:

- 1) Allow for more efficient use of State resources and create a Fitnessgram program that can more effectively understand the connections between environmental factors, academic performance, student grade level – and obesity.
- 2) Allow for targeted use of limited State funds to address issues in the school and areas of Texas that are in most need of support and assistance.
- 3) Create a body of knowledge that can be useful to, and used by the community of organizations that are addressing children's health and obesity.

I'd be happy to answer any questions.

Thank you.

