June 22, 2016

Commissioner Charles Smith
Texas Health and Human Services Commission
Brown-Heatly Building
4900 N. Lamar Blvd.
Austin, TX 78751-2316

Dear Commissioner Smith:

As the State of Texas conducts our Zika preparations, I am writing to encourage the Health and Human Services Commission and Department of State Health Services to integrate our women’s health network into the state response plan.

Because of the particular risks Zika poses to pregnant women, it is vital that our women’s health providers be included in efforts to prevent the spread of this virus among women who are or could become pregnant. I understand the Department of State Health Services is monitoring the number of pregnant women with Zika in the state, working with laboratories to expand testing capacity, and establishing baseline data of known complications. These efforts are important, but we should also maximize the ability of our thousands of women’s health providers — who work directly with the population at the highest risk of serious complications — to protect Texas women. Please let me know what steps are being taken to promote collaboration between local health departments and other providers and to educate clients in our women’s health programs about how they can protect themselves from Zika. I would also like to better understand how the additional $50 million for women’s health programs appropriated in the last legislative session is bolstering family planning at a time when these services are so critically needed.

Please know how much I appreciate your service to our state. I look forward to working with you on our state’s preparations to protect against Zika.

Very truly yours,

[Signature]

Senator Jane Nelson
Cc:

Governor Greg Abbott
Lieutenant Governor Dan Patrick
Speaker of the House Joe Straus
Senator Charles Schwertner, Chair, Health and Human Services Committee
Representative Myra Crownover, Chair, Public Health Committee
Representative Richard Raymond, Chair, Human Services Committee
Commissioner John Hellerstedt, Department of State Health Services
Deputy Executive Commissioner Gary Jessee, Health and Human Services Commission
Associate Commissioner Lesley French, Health and Human Services Commission