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Senator Joan Huffman

Senate District 17

Senator Joan Huffman's Statement on Another Preventable and Senseless Killing of a Police Officer by Violent Offenders out on Bond for Separate Murder Cases

AUSTIN – In 2021, I authored and passed Senate Bill (SB) 6 to address the release practices surrounding habitual and violent offenders and to better protect the safety of victims, law enforcement officers, and our communities. SB 6 also increases accountability and transparency in our judicial system. Unfortunately, we still have Texas judges that are failing to prioritize public safety when determining the bail of violent offenders, and as a result, families like that of Harris County Precinct 3 Deputy Constable Omar Ursin are having to deal with the tragic loss of their loved one. It is unconscionable that the two suspects for Deputy Ursin's murder were out on \$75,000 bonds stemming from separate murder cases that occurred in 2021. That's right, judges let these murderers back into the community only to commit another murder for only a \$75,000 bond!

Even after a complete overhaul of the bail-setting process, and increased transparency requirements, certain judges are still failing to consider the public's safety when setting bail for habitual violent offenders. These judges must understand that their actions in these proceedings, or lack thereof, have real and dire consequences. Therefore, I will be closely monitoring these judicial decisions moving forward to ensure that all provisions of SB 6, and the law, are strictly followed. If evidence is discovered that a judge or magistrate did not abide by all applicable laws, I will personally file a complaint with the State Commission on Judicial Conduct. Although judges have discretion to make decisions based on circumstances, legal precedent, and their own judgment, judges may not act outside the scope of their authority and base decisions on biased views or misinterpret the law. That would be a violation of their *Oath of Office*.

Although the SB 6 reforms to Texas' bail system have already begun to show measurable improvements to public safety and transparency, these efforts were only a first step. Given the continued practice by certain judges enabling repeat violent offenders back into our communities to further terrorize our citizens, further policy change will absolutely be considered during the next legislative session to further streamline the bail-setting process and continue to ensure that public

safety remains a priority. I am already working diligently on strengthening the provisions within SB 6 and hope to achieve the following additional objectives next session:

- To provide Texas voters with the opportunity to expand the Texas Constitution to ensure that judges have another tool to deny bail to habitual and violent offenders that pose a significant safety risk to the public, pass a constitutional amendment that would authorize the denial of bail under some circumstances to a person accused of a violent or sexual offense. Unfortunately, this proposed constitutional amendment failed to pass the Texas House of Representatives last session due to democrat opposition. However, it passed the Texas Senate with overwhelming bi-partisan support.
- To further increase public safety, add the unlawful possession of a weapon by a convicted felon and violation of family violence protective orders to the list of violent offenses that would prohibit a personal bond from being granted.
- To increase transparency and accountability, implement methods to ensure that all bail hearings are available to the public.

Ensuring public safety is the most important duty of government and I remain committed to making it my top priority. As session approaches, I am already working on these public safety initiatives with my legislative colleagues and hope that those who opposed them last session now realize the risks involved to their constituents without these measures.

(Senator Joan Huffman represents District 17, which includes portions of Brazoria, Fort Bend, and Harris Counties. Huffman currently serves as Chair of the Senate Committee on Finance, Chair of the Senate Committee on Jurisprudence, Vice Chair of the Senate Committee on Criminal Justice, and as a senior member of the Senate Committee on Administration, and the Legislative Budget Board. Huffman and her family reside in Houston.)

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