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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

March 8, 2017

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Texas Privacy Act Passed by Senate Committee

The Texas Senate Committee on State Affairs passed Senate Bill 6, the Texas Privacy Act, early Wednesday morning, sending the bill to the full Senate for consideration.

After a marathon hearing that lasted over eighteen hours and consisted of hundreds of witnesses, the committee voted 8 to 1 in favor of the measure, which is authored by Senator Lois Kolkhorst. The committee heard testimony from school officials, parents, pastors, as well as North Carolina Lieutenant Governor Dan Forest, who told lawmakers that the North Carolina economy is strong, having added thousands of jobs since the state passed its own version of the privacy measure.

"My thanks go to the entire committee and all of the witnesses, who listened and contributed to the debate. Ultimately the Senate Committee agreed that we must put the safety, privacy and dignity of our children above anything else," Kolkhorst said.

The legislation will designate that showers, dressing rooms and restrooms are separate for males and females in all schools, colleges, universities and government facilities. The act also allows private businesses and leased public venues in Texas to set their own policy.

Kolkhorst said that the bill has been proposed to address a national debate over privacy rights and gender policies in public facilities, which began in Washington D.C.

On May 13, 2016, then-President Obama issued an edict to all Texas schools, requiring that they provide access to showers, restrooms and dressing rooms based on "an individual's internal sense of gender." Schools were told that if they refused, they may lose federal funding. The idea of boys and girls being allowed to shower together or share a restroom resulted in public outcry, with schools being threatened with lawsuits, and local policies pitting parents against school boards.

Earlier this year, the new federal administration rescinded Obama's controversial order, stating that the issue should be left for states to decide.

"We must provide clear direction to public schools and government buildings," Kolkhorst said. "The Texas Privacy Act is non-discriminatory and inclusive because the act provides personal accommodations for special circumstances while also respecting those who do not consent to a man entering a female restroom." ###