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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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Senator Kolkhorst Secures Rural Mental Health Pilot Program

AUSTIN - During ongoing state budget negotiations, Senator Kolkhorst secured adoption of a rider to the state budget that sets aside funding to improve mental health care in rural Texas.

Senator Kolkhorst's proposal would fund a set of pilot programs across rural Texas to divert individuals who have mental health issues from filling local jails. The rider specifically guides the Health and Human Services Commission to direct funds to rural Local Mental Health Authorities to establish "jail-diversion" programs.

"These programs should reduce incarcerations of individuals with mental illness by diverting these individuals to mental health professionals, with the cooperation of local law enforcement," said Kolkhorst. "Currently, county jails and emergency rooms are sometimes the only option for holding individuals who need mental health treatment. These types of settings can be costly for county taxpayers, and ultimately can fail to provide the person in crisis with the mental health care they need."

Kolkhorst has been working with area Sheriffs, and community leaders on this issue. She credits the Gulf Bend Region as being a leader in mental health, and has praised the region for establishing The Gulf Bend Community Collaborative. This program is a regional partnership between local and county governments, educators, law enforcement, mental health professionals, and the Gulf Bend Region Center, which establishes a local plan for how to avoid mental health related arrests and incarcerations. ###