



# **PRESS RELEASE**

## **RIO GRANDE VALLEY LEGISLATIVE DELEGATION**

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## **Legislators File Bills to Create New South Texas University, South Texas Medical School, Access PUF**

**AUSTIN --** Today, the Rio Grande Valley Legislative delegation will file legislation to create a new University of Texas System university with a medical school in South Texas. Senators will today file a bill authored by state Senators Eddie Lucio, Jr., Juan "Chuy" Hinojosa, Judith Zaffirini, and Kel Seliger. House Bill 1000 by State Representative Rene Oliveira is already filed, and also authored by state Representatives Dan Branch, Ryan Guillen, Armando Martinez, Eddie Lucio III, Sergio Muñoz, Jr. Bobby Guerra, Terry Canales and Oscar Longoria.

Senator Lucio (D-Brownsville) said, "This is a historic day for the Rio Grande Valley. Today's filing is the first important step toward creating the Valley's only Tier One research university, with state-of-the-art facilities and the ability to attract top-notch faculty. The inclusion of the future South Texas school of medicine as part of this new university is the culmination of a decade of work expanding medical education in the region. The Rio Grande Valley will soon become a center for multinational education, medicine, and industry. I want to thank my fellow delegation members for coming together on this important undertaking. I want to also thank Governor Perry, Lt. Governor Dewhurst, and the UT Board of regents for their support. I now call on fellow colleagues in the Texas House and Senate to support us in passing this crucial piece of legislation for the future of South Texas."

"This bill is the framework that will legally create the new university, and allows us, if passed by a two-thirds majority, to access the Permanent University Fund (PUF), and other state and federal research dollars. It will combine existing resources to create a new university maximizing efficiencies in facilities and administration," said Oliveira (D-Brownsville).

Senator Hinojosa (D-McAllen) said, "This legislation, creating a new university in South Texas by merging UT-Pan American and UT-Brownsville and establishing a free standing medical school, has the potential of providing endless educational and healthcare benefits for our families in the Rio Grande Valley. I am proud that we stand united as a delegation embracing a regional mindset to draft the legislation we are filing today. The transformation of the Rio Grande Valley through education could soon be a reality and it is critical that we as a state invest in education and in the people of South Texas."

"As a member of the Valley delegation, specifically, as the senator for Starr County, I am delighted to co-author legislation that merges our regional institutions into a future emerging research university," said Senator Zaffirini (D-Laredo), Co-Chair of the Joint Oversight Committee on Higher Education Governance, Excellence, and Transparency and a member of the Senate Higher Education and Finance Committees.

"By joining forces and pooling resources, we will establish a new higher education powerhouse that will expand access and enhance excellence, thereby providing countless new opportunities for students. This will benefit not only South Texas, but also our great state. Truly, our collaboration will unite our communities in ensuring a brighter future for our families.

Together we will strive to secure the support of statewide leaders and our fellow legislators. Success is our highest priority."

"This bill anticipates a new day for higher education in the Valley," said Dan Branch (R-Dallas), Chairman of the House Committee on Higher Education. "We have an historic opportunity to enhance education, research and the economy. It's our vision that the Rio Grande Valley will one day rival Silicon Valley as an intersection of education and innovation."

Rep. Ryan Guillen (D-Rio Grande City) said, "This vital piece of legislation will create a comprehensive University of Texas component encompassing multiple counties on the Texas border. It represents an offer of excellence in higher educational opportunities for all South Texans. I couldn't be more pleased to offer my support as co-author and sponsor of legislation that will create the new South Texas component of the University of Texas System."

"This is the first step in a long process. I am supportive of the merger of both universities, UT-Pan American and UT-Brownsville. I am also supportive of a medical school in the Rio Grande Valley; however, there are still many steps in the process and questions we are waiting to be answered from the UT system regarding structure and placement," said Rep. Armando Martinez (D-Weslaco).

"The goal is to be as efficient as possible using existing resources and technology," said Rep. Eddie Lucio III (D-Harlingen). "The new university will increase enrollment and provide access to increased funding, which means improved quality of life and new opportunities for our students and region."

"We are poised to make a real difference for the people of our Valley. For a generation we have called for solutions to our educational and health care challenges in the Rio Grande Valley, and the creation of a new university and a state of the art medical school will enhance the level of higher education for a broad spectrum of people and institutions for generations to come. The infusion of jobs, programs, and health care infrastructure that will come along with the new university will benefit the entire region and I am very pleased and honored to have been a part of its development," said Rep. Sergio Muñoz, Jr. (D-Mission).

Rep. Bobby Guerra (D-McAllen) said, "I commend Senator Hinojosa, Senator Lucio and Senator Zaffirini, as well as Chairman Oliveira for their leadership with the Valley Delegation in taking great steps to bring the merger/medical school to the Rio Grande Valley. The Valley Delegation members have been working cohesively to make this dream a reality. With continued hard work, we can finally stop the 'brain drain' of our most talented students studying elsewhere and not returning to the Rio Grande Valley; an accomplishment that will have a huge impact on the future economy of our great state."

"Education is the cornerstone of our society, and the creation of this new university signifies an unprecedented expansion of higher education in our region. The merger of these learning institutions, and the creation of a Medical School, will forever change the educational, and economic landscape of the entire Rio Grande Valley. I am deeply honored to have had the opportunity to represent my constituents and the people of South Texas as we turn a new page in the history of education, and equal opportunity," said Rep. Terry Canales (D-Edinburg).

"I see this as a great opportunity for the entire Rio Grande Valley, including my constituents in both Hidalgo and Cameron Counties," said Representative Oscar Longoria (D-La Joya). "It will provide the essential

educational and economic opportunities that our region can benefit from for generations to come. I look forward to working closely with my fellow Legislators in making this effort a reality for our deserving region."

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