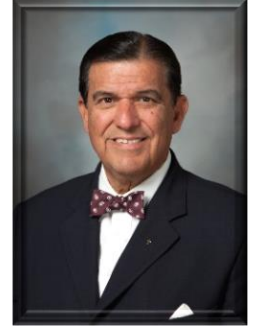




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Sen. Lucio Issues Update on Request to Gov. Abbott for Increased Resources and Medical Staff for Valley Hospitals *July 4 letter to Texas Governor and July 5 update on Texas' response to alarming COVID-19 surge released*

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE:

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AUSTIN, TX – Today, Senator Eddie Lucio, Jr. (D-Brownsville) released his July 4 correspondence to Governor Greg Abbott where he made an urgent plea for greater state assistance to the Rio Grande Valley amid the alarming rise of COVID-19 patients, which has severely strained the local health care system and caused local hospitals to reach critical capacity.

In his July 4 correspondence, Sen. Lucio wrote to the Texas Governor, *"the constituents that you and I represent are hurting and our hospitals in the Rio Grande Valley are at critical capacity, struggling to take care of patients. I write to you on behalf of the good people of the Rio Grande Valley region and respectfully request that you provide immediate help to our Valley hospitals. The severe strain the alarming surge of COVID-19 patients has overwhelmed our local ability to take care of COVID-19 and non-COVID-19 patients. Consequently, our Valley hospitals are in dire need of additional resources and medical personnel. I respectfully request Texas to strengthen its resolve to our medically underserved communities in the Senate District that I represent and that you make available resources at your disposal to immediately assist, strengthen, and support our local health care system in the Rio Grande Valley."*

Senator Lucio went on to report to Governor Abbott that, *"In a meeting as recently as this last Wednesday, July 1, with the CEOs of our Valley Hospitals we discussed how the coronavirus outbreak has devastated our hospitals and resulted in more than a 500 percent increase in hospitalizations in our local hospitals. Regrettably, this has caused the demand for intensive care units to exceed the available supply, which puts at risk the public health and safety of the constituents that you and I represent. That is why I reiterate my prior requests for prioritized assistance to the region that I represent and seek your help in strengthening the state's response to the alarming COVID-19 outbreak in the Rio Grande Valley. Be it from the state's allocation of Federal CARES Act funding, unexpended General Revenue, or Rainy Day Fund monies, our Valley Hospitals need critical financial assistance to address their lack of resources and capacity."*

Governor Abbott was then reminded of Senator Lucio's prior requests to help the region that he represents. Sen. Lucio's July 4 letter states, *"As I have previously shared with you, regrettably, our region does not have the tax base or resources to address the soaring COVID-19 outbreak. Consequently, we cannot finance locally the creation of isolated environments to expand our capacity or to retrofit, renovate, or build facilities to keep up with the surging coronavirus."*

With the best interests of the constituents that he represents, Senator Lucio informed Governor Abbott that *"the rising tide of COVID-19 patients has strained our public health system so much that we are also in need of greater health care personnel. That is why I respectfully ask you to make increased levels of medical professionals (doctors, nurses, and support health staff) -- be it from Texas National Guard forces or from regions of the state -- available to our Valley hospitals, which are in dire need of their help. Along with greater amounts of medical supplies and personal protective equipment, our local health care system could be greatly assisted by you sending additional resources from the state's strategic reserve supply and inventory."*

On midday on Sunday (July 5 at 12:23 pm), officials from the Governor's Office provided the following preliminary update of information to Senator Lucio concerning *"the response to the requests for assistance in the RGV."*

"Related to staffing, here are the staff we have deployed via BCFS (628):

- 1. Valley Baptist Medical Center in Harlingen: 56 staff deployed*
- 2. Valley Baptist Medical Center in Brownsville: 32 staff deployed*
- 3. Harlingen Medical Center in Harlingen: 22 staff deployed*
- 4. Harlingen Regional Medical Center in Brownsville: 28 staff deployed*
- 5. Edinburg Regional Medical Center in Edinburg: 55 staff deployed*
- 6. Doctors Hospital Renaissance in Edinburg: 354 staff deployed*
- 7. Rio Grande Regional Hospital in McAllen: 46 staff deployed*
- 8. McAllen Heart Hospital in Edinburg: 8 staff deployed*
- 9. Starr County Memorial: 27 staff deployed last night*

In process:

- 1. Ambulance strike team assistance and lab technician assistance to Starr County*
- 2. An additional nurse deploying to Starr County*
- 3. 32 staff for Knapp Medical Center in Weslaco*
- 4. Vent deployment to the region tomorrow*
- 5. Vent deployment to Doctors Hospital tonight (10)*

Other Items:

- 6. Ventilators at Mission Regional Medical Center and South Texas Health Systems (3 each)*
- 7. Ambulance strike teams in Hidalgo and Cameron counties*
- 8. Epidemiologist surge for the region"*

Senator Lucio issued the following statement concerning the preliminary update that the Governor's Office provided to him a day after he made his July 4 urgent plea for assistance to help the Rio Grande Valley with greater resources and medical personnel to address the rising COVID-19 outbreak.

"I greatly appreciate the critical steps Texas has initially taken to help the local health care system in my district and to provide direly needed help to our local hospitals.

Because we are a medically underserved region, which has had its economy devastated by the coronavirus, I reiterate my request to provide our local hospitals priority assistance from Texas. Be it from the state's allocation of Federal CARES Act funding, unexpended General Revenue, the Economic Stabilization Fund or other sources, the communities that I represent are in need of specialized aid since they do not have the tax base or resources to address the soaring COVID-19 outbreak. Regrettably, as the CEOs of our local Valley hospitals and I discussed as recently as this July 1st, we cannot finance locally the creation of greatly needed isolated environments to expand our capacity or to retrofit, renovate, or build facilities to keep up with the surging coronavirus.

I join our local hospitals in stating that we are all thankful for the initial support Texas has provided. As the COVID-19 outbreak continues to expand at alarming rates and further strains our local public health system, our state must continue to strengthen its effort to support our local hospitals and better protect our families in the Rio Grande Valley. With the wellbeing of the constituents that I represent, I respectfully reiterate my request for the Governor to make available critical financial resources to our local hospitals to address our region's dire lack of resources and capacity to keep our constituents safe and healthy amid an alarmingly expanding pandemic."

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Senator Eddie Lucio, Jr. (D – Brownsville) represents Cameron, Hidalgo, Kenedy, Kleberg, and Willacy Counties. He is the Chairman of the Senate Committee on Intergovernmental Relations; Vice Chairman of the Senate Committee on Education; Member of the Senate Committees on State Affairs; Veteran Affairs & Border Security; and of the Select Committees on Redistricting; and, Texas Ports. He is member of the Sunset Advisory Commission and has been an ex-officio member of the DSHS Task Force of Border Public Health Officials since 2017. Elected in 1991, Lucio is third in seniority in the Texas Senate.