

February 2, 2017

State of Texas
Senate Committee on State Affairs

Senator Huffman, et al,

I am writing today to express my opposition to Senate Bill 4 – and my sincere desire to work with both the Senate and the House to pass legislation responsive to the public safety needs of our State. The current draft of Senate Bill 4, however, does not meet that standard.

253 Counties in the State of Texas are already utilizing the tools they need to work closely with the federal government to keep dangerous, violent criminals off our streets – while keeping scarce public safety resources focused on local law enforcement priorities.

As the Sheriff of Harris County, my duty is to protect the public and maintain the peace. I have more than 25 years of combined experience working on public safety issues – including street level experience as a Houston Police Officer and policy-making experience as a Houston City Councilmember and Mayor Pro-Tem.

I have worked in nearly every community in Houston, including our vibrant immigrant communities. Houston and Harris County are among the most diverse in America. We draw great strength from our diversity; yet the mix of cultures, languages and history can create public safety challenges.

In my experience, keeping the peace requires all our communities working together – with residents reporting crimes when they are victims and serving as witnesses to help prevent the furtherance of other crimes. It's the foundation of community-oriented policing.

As currently drafted, I am concerned that Senate Bill 4 could limit our ability to address a myriad of local safety priorities – such as rape, murder and human trafficking to elder abuse and the challenges of mental health in our criminal justice system. I am also concerned about the risk of an unintended consequence: creating a climate of fear and suspicion that could damage our efforts to reinforce trust between law enforcement and the communities we serve.

For these reasons I urge the Committee to scrutinize the requirements on local law enforcement in the current draft of Senate Bill 4.

Many of my constituents have also expressed their concerns with Senate Bill 4. I therefore am asking the Committee to ensure the public's voice is considered during the contemplation of this important piece of legislation.

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In a time of scarce resources, we need policies that encourage our law enforcement agencies to work together, and with the communities we serve. I thank you for your thoughtful consideration, and look forward to offering additional assistance as needed.

Respectfully,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Ed Gonzalez', written in a cursive style.

Ed Gonzalez, Sheriff
Harris County Sheriff's Office