

FROM THE OFFICE OF  
**STATE REPRESENTATIVE RUTH JONES MCCLENDON**

**For Immediate Release**

Thursday, August 16, 2007

Contact: Janis Reinken, Chief of Staff  
512/463-0708 (Austin)



**Representative McClendon Applauds Funding  
for Safe Needle Exchange Program**

(San Antonio) – State Representative Ruth Jones McClendon (House District 120) praised the action of Bexar County Commissioners, who voted unanimously on Wednesday to approve \$60,000 in initial funding to support a harm reduction (safe needle exchange and outreach) pilot program in Bexar County.

Representative McClendon introduced the amendment to Senate Bill 10, a Medicaid-related Bill which authorized establishment of several pilot programs, including this one in Bexar County. She attended the public budget work session in Commissioners Court to express her support of the pilot program. "This is a public health strategy that promotes a healthier, safer community," said McClendon. "The desired outcomes of the pilot program are to lessen the fiscal burden on local health authorities, and to save lives -- all of which translates into the saving of tax dollars and promoting the public good."

Among others expressing support for the program were speakers on behalf of the Texas Medical Association (Dr. Janet Realini), the Center for Healthcare Services (Moses Esquivel), the American Civil Liberties Union of Texas (Tracey Hayes), and Constable Jimmy Willborn, himself a former narcotics officer. The Commissioners received letters of support from San Antonio Senators Jeff Wentworth and Leticia Van de Putte, and local Representatives Joe Straus, Jose Menendez, and Robert Puente. Also, Representative Solomon Ortiz, Jr., and the City of Houston Department of Health Services wrote letters in support, expressing hopes that the pilot program would be successful and lead to future implementation of similar programs in Nueces County and Harris County. El Paso and Travis Counties also have expressed interest.

The Commissioners authorized the \$60,000 in initial funding needed to go forward with the planning, design and implementation of the Harm Reduction program. Estimates are that 5,000 people in Bexar County could be served annually, by providing public health information, referrals for substance abuse recovery and treatment, and kits including antibiotic ointment, sterile syringes, and clean swabs and cottons. The initial funding will pay for staff to begin program development and outline the services to be provided starting by January 2008, if at all possible. In addition, the Center for Health Care Services (CHCS) has committed \$3,000 toward the planning process.

"We must recognize that drug use occurs in every community, and this program is a gateway to bring users information and treatment while reducing the number of new infections that occur with needle sharing," said County Judge Nelson Wolff. The primary purposes of the program are to prevent the spread of infectious diseases such as HIV/AIDS and hepatitis, refer program participants to recovery and help reduce high-risk behaviors, and conserve public health funds.