

NUECES COUNTY HOSPITAL DISTRICT

Briefing Paper

SUBJECT: Proposed 90th Texas Legislative Session Agenda — Advocacy Positions and Legislative Pursuits

Purpose

To brief the Board of Managers regarding the District's preliminary agenda for the 90th Texas Legislature and to distinguish between matters presented as Advocacy Positions and matters identified as a Legislative Pursuit.

Overview

The proposed agenda identifies four healthcare priorities intended to strengthen medical education, expand healthcare workforce capacity, improve access to behavioral health services, and streamline access to indigent health care services in South Texas.

The working document places the first three priorities—Graduate Medical Education, Medical Workforce Development, and Regional Behavioral Health Infrastructure—under the heading “Advocacy Position.” The fourth priority—CIHCP Streamlining through YourTexasBenefits.com—is expressly identified as a “Legislative Pursuit.” This distinction reflects a difference in the specificity and intended method of pursuing the respective priorities.

Distinction Between Advocacy Positions and Legislative Pursuits

For purposes of the proposed agenda, an Advocacy Position expresses a policy, funding, or programmatic objective that the District supports and may advance with legislators, State agencies, healthcare organizations, and other stakeholders. An Advocacy Position establishes the outcome or direction the District favors without necessarily committing the District to seek enactment of a particular bill or specified statutory language.

A Legislative Pursuit is more specific. It identifies an objective for which changes to State law are proposed and describes the statutory provisions, new authorities, or implementation requirements that would be sought through legislation. A Legislative Pursuit therefore contemplates active development, sponsorship, introduction, or support of legislation designed to accomplish the identified changes.

The distinction does not mean that an Advocacy Position could never result in legislation. Legislative action, appropriations, budget riders, or statutory authority may ultimately be necessary to accomplish an advocacy objective. Rather, the distinction describes the current level of specificity and commitment in the working agenda: Advocacy Positions identify outcomes the District supports, while a Legislative Pursuit identifies a defined statutory initiative the District proposes to advance.

Advocacy Position I — Graduate Medical Education

The District's first Advocacy Position supports increased investment in Graduate Medical Education to expand physician training and retention. The agenda calls for increased Medicaid GME supplemental payments, funding for existing and new residency slots, incentives for expansion of training slots, support for teaching hospitals, and additional funding through General Revenue and budget riders.

This priority is appropriately characterized as an Advocacy Position because it identifies funding and policy outcomes the District supports rather than a specific amendment to State law. The District could advocate for these objectives through the State appropriations process, budget riders, agency funding decisions, or legislation developed by other parties.

Advocacy Position II — Medical Workforce Development

The second Advocacy Position seeks authority and tools for the District to address shortages in essential medical specialties based on local community health needs. The agenda identifies potential financial incentives, professional protections, recruitment assistance, and minimum service commitments.

Although portions of this objective—particularly new District authority or liability protections—could require legislation, the working agenda presently describes the desired policy framework rather than identifying specific code sections or proposed statutory amendments. It therefore remains classified as an Advocacy Position at this stage. If the District later develops specific statutory language to confer or clarify these authorities, that portion of the priority could appropriately become a Legislative Pursuit.

Advocacy Position III — Regional Behavioral Health Infrastructure

The third Advocacy Position supports expansion of regional behavioral health infrastructure and planning for a State-supported mental health facility in the Coastal Bend. The agenda supports State-supported regional facilities, services for adults, children, and justice-involved populations, partnerships with local mental health authorities and community providers, integration of inpatient, crisis, and outpatient services, and a State appropriation for a feasibility study.

This priority is framed primarily as advocacy for State investment, planning, and regional infrastructure rather than as a request for specified statutory amendments. The District could pursue the objective through appropriations, budget riders, agency planning, legislative studies, and support for related legislation without necessarily sponsoring a stand-alone statutory proposal.

Legislative Pursuit IV — CIHCP Streamlining and Integrated Benefits Portal Access

The fourth priority is expressly identified as a Legislative Pursuit because it proposes defined changes to State law to integrate the County Indigent Health Care Program with YourTexasBenefits.com and the State's existing eligibility infrastructure.

The proposed pursuit includes amendments to Chapter 61 of the Health and Safety Code to establish the portal as an authorized CIHCP application pathway; new statutory authority for HHSC to share eligibility data; automatic referral of qualifying Medicaid denials; amendments to Chapter 531 of the Government Code to expand the integrated eligibility mandate and require development of a CIHCP intake pathway and statewide service-area mapping; and a new provision in Chapter 285 addressing hospital district reliance on portal-verified financial information.

Unlike the three Advocacy Positions, the CIHCP initiative identifies specific existing statutes to amend, new statutory sections to create, duties to impose on HHSC, and an implementation schedule. It therefore represents a defined legislative proposal rather than a general policy or funding position.

Practical Differences

Characteristic	Advocacy Position	Legislative Pursuit
Primary purpose	State the policy, funding, or program outcome the District supports.	Seek a defined change in State law or statutory authority.
Level of specificity	Broad to moderately specific objectives.	Specific statutory changes, new provisions, or mandated actions.
Method of advancement	Advocacy, appropriations, budget riders, agency engagement, coalitions, or support of related legislation.	Bill development, legislative sponsorship, statutory amendments, and direct legislative advocacy.
Need for District-sponsored legislation	Not necessarily.	Generally contemplated by the proposal.
Current agenda items	GME; Medical Workforce Development; Regional Behavioral Health Infrastructure.	CIHCP Streamlining — Integrated Benefits Portal Access.

Potential Evolution of Agenda Items

The classifications need not be permanent. An Advocacy Position may evolve into a Legislative Pursuit if the District determines that a specific statutory change is necessary and develops a defined legislative proposal. Conversely, the District may continue to advance an Advocacy Position through appropriations, agency action, stakeholder partnerships, or support for legislation initiated by others without developing its own bill.

This distinction allows the Board to support broad healthcare policy priorities while separately identifying those matters for which the District intends to pursue specific legislation.

Fiscal and Administrative Considerations

The preliminary agenda does not itself appropriate District funds or establish a specific fiscal commitment. Fiscal and administrative effects would depend on the particular advocacy activities undertaken, legislation ultimately pursued or enacted, State appropriations, program design, and any local participation requirements.

A Legislative Pursuit may require a more focused implementation effort, including development and review of statutory language, legislative sponsorship, stakeholder coordination, testimony or other legislative support, and subsequent implementation planning if enacted. Advocacy Positions may involve similar external engagement but do not necessarily require development of District-specific legislation.

Board Consideration

The Board is being asked to receive and discuss the preliminary legislative agenda and the distinction between the District's Advocacy Positions and its Legislative Pursuit. The Board may use these classifications to clarify which priorities represent general policy and funding objectives supported by the District and which priorities are intended to be advanced through specific changes to State law.

Summary

The proposed agenda contains three Advocacy Positions and one Legislative Pursuit. Graduate Medical Education, Medical Workforce Development, and Regional Behavioral Health Infrastructure are presented as Advocacy Positions reflecting policy, funding, and program objectives the District supports. CIHCP Streamlining through YourTexasBenefits.com is presented as a Legislative Pursuit because it proposes specific amendments and additions to State law and defined implementation requirements. The distinction provides a practical framework for communicating both the District's broader legislative priorities and the particular statutory initiative it intends to pursue.