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Dear Chairperson Truitt and the Members of the Pensions, Investments & Financial Services Committee:

I am writing today in support of HB 2026 which requires the Board of Trustees of the Employees Retirement System of Texas to study the coverage of bariatric surgery as a benefit for state employees and, if cost neutral or cost effective, implement such coverage.

The Obesity Action Coalition (OAC), a national charitable organization made up of individuals affected by all forms of obesity, strongly supports efforts to expand the treatments of obesity. We believe that adding a bariatric surgery benefit to the state employee health plan will not only improve the health of those enrolled in the plan, but will ultimately provide a financial savings to the state through lowered future healthcare costs. It is important to remember that the treatment of obesity is the prevention and treatment of many other expensive chronic diseases. Much of the nation's diabetes, heart disease and cancer costs can be directly attributed to the obesity epidemic and a wide variety of data suggests if we can treat obesity, we can lower these costs.

In regards to bariatric surgery specifically, I would request you review the OAC Fact Sheet, titled "Why It Makes Sense to Provide Coverage of Bariatric Surgery" at <http://www.obesityaction.org/advocacytools/wlsfs.php>. Studies demonstrate that bariatric surgery is safe and effective in reducing weight as well as obesity related conditions and is cost effective. In fact, several studies show that the return on investment in the cost of a surgical procedure is now less than two years due to the dramatic reduction in obesity related illnesses.

Bariatric surgery should be available and reserved for those who meet strict criteria set by the National Institute of Health (in general, someone who is more than 100 pounds overweight) and who have failed at less-invasive weight-loss efforts. The decision to have bariatric surgery is not an easy one. Patients who undergo such procedure usually agonize over the decision for several years before having such a procedure even when coverage is available. Surgery is not easy. As with any surgical procedure, there are risks, but for appropriate selected candidates, the benefits often outweigh the risks and the results can be truly life-changing and life-saving.

Insurers, employers and government agencies across the country are coming to the understanding that addressing obesity among their constituents makes sense. Just last week, Mississippi enacted legislation expanding their obesity treatment programs for their employees including adding bariatric surgery coverage. I would encourage you join them, as well as Medicare, a vast majority of state employee programs, state Medicaid programs and major employers, by evaluating and providing coverage for bariatric surgery. Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "Joe Nadglowski".

Joseph Nadglowski, Jr.
President/CEO

About the OAC:

The OAC is a national non-profit organization comprised mostly of individuals who have been personally affected by obesity. In addition, our membership includes more than 1,000 healthcare providers who care for those affected. Our strong belief is that obesity, like other diseases, must be both prevented and treated. Those either currently obese, or at risk for developing obesity, and are ready to make a change in their lives, should have expanded access to both prevention and treatment avenues.