

The Honorable Drew Darby, Chair
House Select Committee on Mass Violence Prevention & Community Safety
P.O. Box 2910
Austin, TX 78768

RE: Written Testimony in response to the Formal Request for Information for Duty (4): Evaluate the ongoing and long-term workforce needs of the state related to cybersecurity, mental health, law enforcement, and related professionals.

Dear Chairman Darby and Committee Members:

I hope this letter reaches you in good health and spirits, all things considered. I appreciate the opportunity to submit written testimony and information on behalf of Emergence Health Network about ongoing and long-term mental health services during such challenging times.

As you know, earlier this month was the one-year anniversary of the tragic mass shooting in El Paso. Not a day has gone by that we do not feel the implications of such calamity that changed our community forever. We did, however, emerge stronger and more resilient as our organization immediately incorporated behavioral health into the community's response to the August 3 attack. Our staff were immediately dispatched to local hospitals to provide supports and services, and we spearheaded local efforts to stand up locations where community members could receive services free of charge during those crucial days and hours.

The trauma of our community being attacked has had effects far beyond the people who were at Wal-Mart in Cielo Vista that day, and the increased demand for behavioral health services has continued through to this day. EHN currently maintains a community resource center specifically to treat persons dealing with behavioral health issues associated with the events of 8/3. We are still treating over 120 Texans dealing with the aftermath.

This is just one example of how our community continues to heal. We have spoken to other communities across Texas and across the nation about how long-term supports and services are crucial, as communities recover from the effects of mass violence. The importance of education and messaging to combat stigma and encourage individuals to seek treatment when appropriate.

As you evaluate Duty #4, we urge you and the Legislature to consider the needs of mental health services largely through the lens of prevention to effectively promote community safety and spare other cities of tragic events of mass violence, like we sadly experienced in our beautiful Sun City.

Sincerely,

Kristen D. Daugherty