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Abbott's Veto Pen Targets Low-Income Texans, Clean Air, Groundwater Research

AUSTIN, Texas - On Monday, Texas Governor Greg Abbott cut funds from important low-income and clean air planning programs, as well as brackish groundwater research, using his line item veto power. Abbott also signed SB 1731 into law, which keeps the Texas Emissions Reduction Program (TERP) alive but at much lower funding levels.

Abbott cut \$87 million for the state's Low-Income Vehicle Repair Assistance Program (LIRAP), a program designed to assist low-income Texans repair or replace vehicles that do not pass state inspection. In addition, Abbott vetoed \$6 million for air quality planning at the Texas Commission on Environmental Quality, claiming it could be funded by local governments.

LIRAP is a voluntary 10-year old program that is self funded from Dallas, Houston, and Austin area counties through a \$2-\$6 charge on annual automobile emission inspections. Vehicles repaired through the program pollute less, thus improving the air quality of these urban areas. This money can be used for no other purpose.

SB 1731 extends and expands the highly-successful TERP program to help Texas meet its clean air obligations under federal law. Unfortunately, the Legislature cut the overall TERP budget from \$236 million to \$155 million over two years.

In response, Cyrus Reed, Conservation Director of the Sierra Club's Lone Star Chapter, and Ken Kramer, Water Resources Chair of the Sierra Club's Lone Star Chapter, issued the following statements:

Cyrus Reed:

"This is Abbott dictating local affairs again. He's supposed to be the Governor, not City Council Member and County Commissioner. Essentially, Mr. Abbott has decided that he alone knows what is best for everyone, and that includes how much pollution you breathe in. While Mr. Abbott and the Legislature chop effective programs that serve the public well, we hope the Legislative Budget Board can meet during the interim and make an adjustment to the budget to at least fund the new TERP programs appropriately."

Ken Kramer:

"The Governor's veto of funds for brackish groundwater studies is unfortunate. Texas needs more information about our groundwater resources, fresh and brackish, if we are to use those resources wisely to meet our water needs. The Governor is correct in saying that the Texas

Water Development Board has already completed several studies on brackish groundwater in some regions, but there are many other regions in need of study.”

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