CSHB 1 A GOOD BILL; Let’s Finish the Job!

The Sierra Club Lone Star Chapter appreciates the tremendous job of Chair Zerwas, all the members of the Committee on Appropriations and the staff of the Legislative Budget Board, as well as state agency personnel in developing the Committee Substitute to HB 1. We recognize all the untold hours that went into creating this good bill, which will more adequately meet the needs of the state, including through its commitment to public education, then most previous budget bills have.

As a conservation organization, we follow Article VI most closely and appreciate the hard work done by the workgroup led by Chair Toni Rose. The workgroup increased appropriations for important programs at the Railroad Commission of Texas, TCEQ, Water Development Board and Texas Parks and Wildlife. We are particularly pleased with the commitment to add oil and gas and pipeline inspectors at the RRC, and municipal solid waste inspectors at TCEQ. More boots on the ground will assure our industries will do a better job complying with state and federal laws.

We do want to note a couple areas where we believe CSHB 1 falls short.

First, whether through a contingency rider based on legislation, or by finally lowering the GR-D Account No. 5071 (TERP), the 86th Legislature needs to recognize that Texas industry, consumers and drivers have created more than $1.7 billion in TERP funds that have not been allocated by HB 1. As you move to the floor, and as TERP legislation begins to make it through the process, we believe the modest amount of TERP funding in HB 1 (about $150 million) must be tripled to begin to deal with the real consequences of non-attainment in San Antonio, Houston and Dallas. Folks we are under a 2021 deadline to come into compliance with health-based ozone standards and we need to spend money to reduce emissions from mobile sources. And the money is there.

Related to these issues, we also believe that slightly more money will be needed for ozone monitoring equipment and air quality planning grants - particularly in Bexar County -- studies at the Energy Systems Laboratory (in Article III) to get credit for our efforts to reduce emissions, and a directive to the TCEQ to study our regulations to limit air emissions from oil and gas facilities. Just as we reduce emissions at our power plants and mobile sources, we must examine how we can better avoid emissions at our growing oil and gas facilities. TCEQ believes it can conduct this study without the need for additional resources but they must receive direction to do so.
Second, there are still unmet needs in our Parks and Wildlife Department. In particular we should give added flexibility in HB 1 to allow Parks and Wildlife to acquire new parkland if the opportunity arises, and to finally plan for the development of parks that remain unopened -- from Palo Pinto, to Chinati Mountains, to the Devils River to Davis Hill. Some of these properties have been around literally for decades but remained unopen. Moreover, there is still a need to increase funding for local park grants, where most Texans enjoy the outdoors.

The Sierra Club looks forward to working with all House members to improve CSHB 1!

Sincerely,

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