Gov. Perry Discusses Pending Improvement to State Schools

Signs Senate Bill 643

*Note - Gov. Perry frequently departs from prepared remarks.

Thursday, June 11, 2009 • Austin, Texas • Speech

Good afternoon and thank you all for being here today, to mark an important milestone in our state's approach to caring for some of our most vulnerable citizens.

Whether these folks live in a state facility or in therapeutic community settings, we are obligated by basic human decency to provide them with a safe setting in which to live, learn and grow.

As you are aware, our current system has some serious shortcomings that have exposed those in our care to inexcusable treatment. Like you, I was disturbed enough by the discovery of those failings to declare their correction an emergency issue at the start of the 81st legislative session.

I am proud that the Legislature addressed the needed reforms and resources with the passage of Senate Bill 643 which includes a combination of common-sense approaches and $48 million in much-needed funding.

This bill improves oversight of the state school population with a variety of measures, from increased penalties for wrongdoing, to increased use of monitoring technology in our facilities. It also provides for essential staff increases and improvements in training for employees, to better equip them to provide the best care.

Speaking of employees, I want to address the episodes of neglect and abuse on the part of some state school employees. First, those involved will be prosecuted to the fullest extent of the law. Secondly, those bad actors don't accurately represent the remarkable employees of our state school system.

The vast majority of folks who staff these facilities have devoted their academic and professional lives to caring for the less fortunate. They deal with daily challenges that most of us could not even imagine, and do so with a grace and courage that is truly inspiring.

I hope the additional resources, training and other reforms in this bill not only prevent abuse, but also provide better support to the hard-working caregivers who are, too often, under-appreciated.

Senate Bill 643 certainly allows us to meet the terms of our settlement with the Department of Justice, but, more importantly, it will improve the care we extend to those in our system.

I am grateful to our Legislature for crafting this bill.