



## **Texas Business, Tourism, Chamber Leaders Call on Texas to Reject Discriminatory Legislation as Divisive, Unnecessary, and Economically Dangerous**

Contact: Angela Hale 512.289.2995, [angela@redmediagroup.com](mailto:angela@redmediagroup.com)

We will livestream the event for reporters who can't attend in person: <https://www.facebook.com/texaswelcomesall/>

**AUSTIN, TEXAS- March 27, 2019** – Texas business leaders gathered at the Capitol to urge a focus on core issues rather than discriminatory legislation, including two “priority” bills—the sweeping SB 17 and the SB 15 committee substitute—and more than a dozen other bills that would cast Texas in a negative light. Business, chamber, and tourism executives discussed the risks of such legislation on Texas’ economy.

More than 50 Texas employers, chambers, associations, CVBs, and business coalitions also released an open letter on the importance of diversity and inclusion and in opposition to discriminatory measures.

“Discrimination is again threatening Texas’ reputation as welcoming for businesses and families. These bills create risk for vulnerable people and for businesses, workers, and communities,” said Phillip Jones, President & CEO, VisitDallas / Chair of Texas Welcomes All. “We are still feeling the impacts of the 2017 bathroom bill. This cuts to the heart of our industry, our small businesses, and everyday Texans working to make ends meet.”

“Associations are a driving force behind the meetings and conventions industry,” said John Graham, CEO of the American Society of Association Executives (ASAE). “Our organization now includes anti-discrimination clauses in all of our convention center and hotel contracts, giving associations an ‘out’ in any state that pursues discriminatory legislation. There are meetings already booked in Texas that can be canceled, with no penalty to the association, if Texas pursues legislation that legalizes discrimination.”

If SB 17 or other discriminatory legislation passes in Texas, meeting planners across the globe will not bring their meetings and conventions to Texas,” said Michelle Crowley, VP Global Growth, Professional Convention Management Association (PCMA). “Other states have already felt these repercussions. Boards of organizations and corporations of all kinds are watching this legislative session and will cancel their meetings.”

According to 2017 data tracked by Texas Welcomes All, a total of \$1.4 billion (423,000 hotel nights) was on the line across confirmed and potential cancellations related to the bathroom bill.

“Our job is to speak up before damage happens, and to protect the livelihoods and jobs of the Texans who make our great tourism economy what it is,” said Bob Jameson, President and CEO of Visit Fort Worth. “If we were to lose our long-standing non-discrimination ordinances in Fort Worth and other cities, the negative impacts would be long-lasting, from hotel occupancy and state taxes to wage-earners and local businesses.”

“The North Texas Commission supports policies that strengthen the economic climate of our state. Passage of discriminatory bills would result in terrible economic consequences on talent, tourism, investment, growth, and small businesses,” said Chris Wallace, CEO of North Texas Commission, which represents 95 chambers, 15 cities, and dozens of businesses in a 13-county region of 7.4 million people.

### *Background:*

- *SB 17 would create “religious exemptions” for hundreds of licensed occupations, from barbers to tow truck operators to doctors. If a license holder were to call on “sincerely held religious belief” in taking discriminatory action, the licensing agency would have no recourse to remedy that discrimination.*
- *SB 15 is a paid sick leave preemption bill. As filed, it included exemptions to ensure the bill could not be used to undermine municipal non-discrimination ordinances (NDOs). The committee substitute stripped those exemptions out, putting non-discrimination ordinances at risk.*

###