

**TESTIMONY**  
**Senate Health and Human Services Committee**  
**SB 837 (Watson)**  
**April 3, 2007**

The League of Women Voters of Texas (LWV-TX) strongly supports SB 837 (Watson), that would expand access to preventive health care services and education programs to help reduce unintended pregnancies, prevent the spread of sexually transmitted infections (STI's) and promote healthy families by improving women's access to health care – all while saving scarce public health funds.

LWV-TX is a nonpartisan, political organization with 32 local Leagues across the state. The League believes that all Texas women should be eligible for basic health care services, including maternal and child health care and preventive care. Access to these services is critically important to the health and well-being of women, children, and families.

SB 837, known as the Prevention First Act, would increase outreach for Texas' family planning program through print and broadcast media, websites, and a toll-free telephone number. By increasing enrollment in effective and cost-saving programs, such as the Women's Health Program created in the 79<sup>th</sup> Legislature, Texas will increase access to health care and family planning services for Texans in need.

From a "bottom line" standpoint, family planning and preventive health services are also very cost effective. The Texas Department of State Health Services estimates that it costs less than \$170 per year per woman for family planning services, while it costs more than \$8500 per woman for Medicaid delivery, postnatal and infant care. The Women's Health Program is projected to save Texas \$278 million over five years, and the federal government matches Texas' investment in this program at a ratio of 9 to 1.

SB 837 would also reduce the risk of unintended pregnancies and the spread of sexually transmitted infections through accurate and effective sex education in public schools. The teen birth rate in Texas is the highest in the nation, and nearly half of all new cases of STI's occur among youth ages 15-24, including half of all new HIV infections. Teens need reliable information to protect themselves from the life-long consequences of unintended pregnancies and STI's.

The League thanks the Senate Health and Human Services Committee for your leadership in giving an early hearing to SB 837. We hope that passage of this measure will be a priority for the Texas Legislature during this session.