

# ★ TEXAS IMPACT

PEOPLE OF FAITH WORKING FOR JUSTICE

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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## **Texas Impact Announces New Initiative: Faithful Public School Defenders**

Texas Impact, the oldest and largest interfaith advocacy group in the state announced today, Monday, July 10, its new initiative amplifying the voices of people of faith to champion and promote public education.

The **Faithful Public School Defenders** initiative was announced ahead of the first meeting of the House Select Committee on Educational Opportunity and Enrichment created by Speaker of the House Dade Phelan to recommend education policies for a forthcoming special session, including school choice legislation prioritized by Governor Greg Abbott.

The **Faithful Public School Defenders** will monitor the activities of the legislature, including the House Select Committee; review the research both supporting and opposing various voucher programs; and communicate their conclusions to legislators, staff, and other interested parties in their communities. Texas Impact will review and communicate key measures of current and historical public education support, information vital to upcoming policy deliberations.

**Rev. Franz Schemmel**, the group's president and pastor of Messiah Lutheran Church in Weatherford said voices of local faith communities are vital to the education policy debate.

"For fifty years, Texas Impact has been a champion of public education," said Schemmel. "Our members strongly support public education, and strongly oppose the diversion of precious public dollars to private schools or management groups. We have faith in our local public school boards and the citizens who elect them. We have deep community knowledge of the efforts of parents, teachers, and administrators to offer great quality education to all the school children in Texas, often in spite of serious underfunding."

**Bee Moorhead**, Texas Impact's executive director, said "We intend to listen to all policy arguments. However, we have been engaged in this policy research continuously for decades. We are very familiar with the chronic underfunding of public education historically in our state, the very low pay we provide to teachers, and the fact that lawsuits have often been necessary to compel the legislature to provide the bare minimum for our public education system. We are also familiar with various proposals to divert public money to private education interests.

Frankly, after complete policy review by our members, none has ever been determined to be good public policy.”

“As always, we will listen, study, and discuss,” said Moorhead. “Then we will act, both in Austin and in our communities. The message from our faith groups is loud and clear; public education is too important to sit on the sidelines.”

#### ABOUT TEXAS IMPACT:

Texas Impact is a religious grassroots network whose members include individuals, congregations, and governing bodies of Christian, Jewish, Muslim, and other faiths. Texas Impact exists to advance state public policies that are consistent with the shared values of Texas faith communities.

The non-profit works on a wide variety of public policy issues within the broadly held social concerns of mainstream religious traditions. Texas Impact uses a process of discernment on public policy issues similar to the processes used by many faith traditions, including Scripture, the wisdom of the faith traditions, current public policy information and data, and the experiential knowledge of people of faith to develop our positions and policy goals.

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