

Texas Society of Architects
The Voice for Texas Architecture
A Regional Component of AIA

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March 25, 2020

The Honorable Greg Abbott
Governor of Texas
State Capitol
P.O. Box 12428
Austin, Texas 78711

RE: COVID-19 and Essential Critical Infrastructure Workers and Services

Dear Governor Abbott:

On behalf of the Texas Society of Architects (TxA) and our 7,400 architect members, we thank you for your strong leadership during this ongoing public health crisis and commend you for the decisive actions taken to date to protect public health and save lives. TxA is a state component of the American Institute of Architects (AIA) and is one of the nation's largest organizations for the architecture profession, with 18 regional components.

Architects bring highly specialized knowledge and training to their work in the built environment and provide important professional services designed to ensure that the health, safety and welfare of the public is considered and prioritized in the design and construction process. The profession is committed to assisting as you work to combat the threat of the coronavirus pandemic.

Should future emergency orders be contemplated to clarify the designation of essential businesses and services, TxA respectfully requests that architects be included among those designated as essential critical infrastructure workers or service providers. Guidance under the U.S. Department of Homeland Security Cyber and Infrastructure Security Agency's (CISA) Essential Critical Infrastructure Workforce Memorandum dated March 19, 2020 states that *critical infrastructure are any "systems and assets, whether physical or virtual, so vital to the United States that the incapacity or destruction of such systems and assets would have a debilitating impact on security, national economic security, national public health or safety, or any combination of those matters."* *This definition is appropriately broad to include a wide range of stakeholders who either directly or indirectly enable the functionality of infrastructure systems.*

This requested consideration for clarification and recognition of architects as essential service providers is not because the profession seeks to avoid compliance with statewide public health orders to work remotely and adhere to social distancing measures, but rather to ensure more clear and consistent policy guidance and to eliminate or reduce the possibility of ambiguous or prejudicial policy treatment that might arise from the omission of direct references to architectural services.

TxA understands that these types of decisions regarding work restrictions are currently being made by cities and counties, and we are working in coordination with our members and local chapters to assist governmental entities in their disaster response efforts and to ensure architects are not unintentionally limited or restricted from engaging professionally to protect the public interest. Our members will continue to adhere to all state and local orders and restrictions.

Additionally, our members have technical expertise with regard to healthcare and triage facilities that could help inform and guide local and regional planning efforts that may be needed to address regional shortages of hospital beds and medical facilities, should the number of those that contract COVID-19 continue to increase as projected.

We applaud your ongoing executive leadership and efforts to strategically prepare our state for the challenges we face, noting your actions today to significantly expand hospital capacity across the Lone Star State by waiving certain licensing rules and directing the Texas Health and Human Services Commission to adopt emergency rules to address the need for additional hospital capacity while the state responds to COVID-19.

TxA is undertaking an effort to assist and augment this effort by working with our architect members across the state to conduct an immediate inventory and assessment to identify and catalog other types of buildings and facilities that could be used for various types of emergency response if additional space is needed at the community level. We will keep your office apprised of our efforts and will be working with our members and coordinating with other organizations to prepare a planning roadmap and assessment guidelines to help local governments and service organizations working to meet the tremendous need our state is facing.

Again, thank you for your service and leadership during this challenging time. Please let us know if you need additional information or would like to discuss any of these issues in more detail. We are available to assist and support the COVID-19 disaster response efforts in any way we can.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "James T. Perry". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a large loop at the end.

James T. Perry
EVP/ CEO
Texas Society of Architects