Dear Members of the Texas Legislature:

Demographics throughout the State of Texas are dramatically altering our educational and health care needs. As our population grows, especially in under-served markets, it is important to make higher education opportunities available to all residents throughout the entire state. Creating a university of the 21st century in the Rio Grande Valley is an important part of this commitment to appropriately reflect the demographic diversity. This university, featuring blended and online learning and new and highly technologically-equipped classrooms, represents one of the largest economic development opportunities for the South Texas region.

The University of Texas System Board of Regents and Chancellor Francisco Cigarroa have committed to working with the members of the 83rd Texas Legislature in creating a new university in South Texas. The Houston Hispanic Chamber of Commerce wholeheartedly supports this important and critical initiative. The new university will help to transform one of Texas’ fastest-growing regions and will, ultimately, bring a new economic vitality to the entire state.

On behalf of our board of directors, members, sponsors and other supporters, the Houston Hispanic Chamber of Commerce encourages the Texas Legislature to finalize the legislation that has been passed by the Senate and House and authorize the University of Texas System to establish and maintain a first-class university in South Texas.

The following is a summary of additional key factors that urge immediate passage of this important legislation and key driver of higher education opportunities in the Rio Grande Valley:

- The new university will combine UT Brownsville, UT Pan American and a future medical school. The main academic campuses will be in Brownsville and Edinburg and will also have a strong, visible presence in Harlingen and McAllen. With a combined student population of approximately 28,000 students, the new university will be one of the largest designated Hispanic-serving institutions in the United States.

- The new university will be immediately competitive with current UT emerging research universities. Its initial annual research expenditures would top $11 million; the new university would also have an endowment of $70.5 million. Research discoveries and innovations will likely attract future investors.

- There will be a significant, positive economic impact on Texas. It’s projected that creating the new university and school of medicine will create more than 7,000 new jobs and attract additional economic development to the region.
There should be no initial cost to combining the existing universities to the state of Texas because the UT System and two existing campuses have pledged to absorb all costs associated with the creation and transition.

The new university will be eligible to participate in the Permanent University Fund (PUF). Adding a new university to the list of institutions currently eligible for PUF will have no impact on funding available for the Texas A&M University System and minimal impact on existing UT institutions. Merging UT Brownsville and UT Pan American will also free up more revenue for schools that benefit from the Higher Education Assistance Fund (HEAF). The new university will not be eligible for HEAF funding.

With the new school of medicine, UT plans to graduate approximately 150 medical residents per year and place them in hospitals in Brownsville, Edinburg, Harlingen, and McAllen. Currently, in the 12 counties that make up the Rio Grande Valley, there are only 124 doctors for every 100,000 residents.

On behalf of our board of directors and staff, the Houston Hispanic Chamber of Commerce is proud to support Chancellor Cigarroa and the UT System’s proposal to create a new University of Texas institution in South Texas and requests immediate passage of legislation that has been previously approved in the Senate and House. Our members, sponsors and other supporters continually strive to improve the economic, civic and cultural well-being of our community. This important initiative will help us meet that important responsibility.

Gilbert A. Herrera  
Chairman,  
Houston Hispanic Chamber of Commerce