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LOIS W. KOLKHORST

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KOLKHORST HOLDS PRESS CONFERENCE AND BILL HEARING ON FORCED ORGAN HARVESTING

(AUSTIN, TX) — Texas State Senator Lois W. Kolkhorst (R-Brenham), Chair of the Senate Committee on Health & Human Services (HHS), led a press conference and public hearing on Senate Bill 1040, a bill to combat the practice of forcibly removing human organs for transplant (Forced Organ Harvesting).

Joining Senator Kolkhorst at the press conference were Senator Angela Paxton, Representative Tom Oliverson, Representative Salman Bhojani, and Representative Jacey Jetton, as well as witnesses to this horrific practice.

The testimony shared during this morning's HHS Committee hearing included witnesses who have had firsthand experience with the barbaric and profitable trade, most often found in China. If passed, Kolkhorst's bill prohibits Texas health plans from paying for the transplant of an organ originating from or is transplanted in a country known to participate in forced organ harvesting.

"Forced organ harvesting is a horrific practice. This bill not only brings this issue to more light but also prevents Texans and Texas health plans from unknowingly becoming complicit in forced organ harvesting," said Senator Kolkhorst. "Because health plans are regulated at the state level, Texas holds a powerful tool to combat the hideous industrial-scale practice of forced organ harvesting, particularly those of persecuted religious groups in China."

For over 20 years, the Chinese government has engaged in the practice of forcibly removing human organs for transplant. In June 2019, the non-governmental, independent China Tribunal, operating out of London, announced its finding that China has practiced systematic forced organ removal from prisoners of conscience.

"It is clear to me, through several sessions of work on this issue, that the Chinese Communist Government—and other governments engaged in forced organ harvesting—see its people as a commodity," said Rep. Oliverson. "People are being sacrificed for financial gain by governments that do not care about them and it is our duty to ensure that we not help to enable these practices."

It is believed that organs may have been harvested from hundreds of thousands of incarcerated people and religious groups, particularly Uyghurs, Muslims, Falun Gong practitioners, and House Church Christians, among others. China has enabled what has been deemed “transplant tourism,” where individuals who are critically in need of an organ travel to China and pay tens of thousands of dollars for one of the estimated 60,000 to 90,000 forced transplant surgeries each year.

“Forced organ harvesting is among the most horrific human rights abuses occurring in the world,” said Rep. Jetton in his remarks. “We know the Chinese Communist Party is harvesting organs from ethnic and religious minorities in China. Texas must continue to find ways to combat human rights abuses like organ harvesting, especially in ways that overlap with Texas laws, such as insurance reimbursements. Senator Kolkhorst’s Senate Bill 1040 and Representative Oliverson’s House Bill 2025 take a major step in ensuring we are not supporting organ harvesting by reimbursing these practices in our insurance policies.”

Chinese hospitals are known to schedule these major organ transplant surgeries within two weeks, implying their possible foreknowledge of the origin of these organ “donations.”

“China’s prisons and concentration camps provide a supply of living prisoners as an organ donor pool to provide compatible transplants for patients,” said Senator Kolkhorst. “When a match is found, these prisoners are executed, and their organs harvested for use in a prolific and profitable transplant industry.”

SB 1040 will:

- Prohibit health benefit plan issuers from covering human organ transplants performed in China or in countries known to participate in forced organ harvesting.
- Prohibit health benefit plan issuers from covering human organ transplants where the sale or donation originated in China or in another country known to participate in forced organ harvesting.
- Allow the Commissioner of the Texas Department of State Health Services to designate additional countries who are known to participate in forced organ harvesting.

Co-Authors for SB 1040 are Senator Paxton, Senator Perry, and Senator Hall. HB 2025 by Representative Oliverson is the House Companion bill.

Several witnesses came to Austin from across Texas and around the world to testify for SB 1040 and share their personal stories at the press conference, including:

- Qelbinur Sidik, an Uzbek woman who worked as a Chinese language teacher assigned to work in one of China’s Uyghur “re-education” (concentration) camps. While there, she witnessed the atrocities of China’s forced organ harvesting of their religious, political, and ethnic prisoners.
- Gulbahar Haitiwaji, who worked as a petroleum engineer in Xinjiang, China, and sought asylum in France with her family. Tricked into returning to China, she vanished into its concentration camps, where she spent 2 years before being able to return to France.
- Crystal Chen, who worked for one of the largest international trade companies in China. A practitioner of Falun Gong, she was jailed for years for not giving up her belief. After surviving persecution and torture, she escaped to the United States and is now a passionate voice for those left behind.

“The bravery of the survivors who have spoken out and brought light to the unspeakable evil of forced organ harvesting and transplant tourism cannot be overstated,” said Senator Paxton. “Without their testimony, some would no doubt find it impossible to believe that such an atrocity could exist. I am honored to be part of the effort to end this deplorable practice once and for all and to support Senate Bill 1040 by Chair Kolkhorst.”

“For nearly a decade, we’ve seen evidence that China is committing genocide and forced organ harvesting against the Uyghur Muslim community,” said Rep. Bhojani. “During this holy month of Ramadan, we must ensure the safety of our Muslim brothers and sisters across Texas and around the world and work to stop these injustices from the Chinese government. I appreciate Senator Kolkhorst’s efforts in bringing attention to this important issue and look forward to working with my colleagues to pass SB 1040.”

“Many devout groups of faith are persecuted by the Chinese Communist Party for the crime of simply existing and being religious. This is precisely why we respect religious freedom so much in the United States,” said Kolkhorst. “It has been widely reported by international human rights organizations that more than one million Muslims have been imprisoned in China since just 2017 – with tens of thousands believed to have died. Beyond the defense of religion, this is defense of basic human rights. The evidence is overwhelming, and the time to act is now.”

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