



House Public Health Committee Hearing
March 23rd, 2011
HB 2505

Good morning Members, I am Lauren Dimitry, Health Policy Coordinator at Texans Care for Children. At Texans Care for Children, we look to our broad base of community-based experts—our partners and 147 members throughout the state who together represent hundreds of thousands of Texas children—to inform our work and help us in developing our legislative agenda. The tiniest Texans are also some of our state’s most vulnerable. Health issues encountered in infancy can have lifelong effects on wellbeing and development. Prematurity and low birth weight are serious and growing problems in Texas that can lead to lifelong disabilities. In addition to lifelong health complications, the annual costs—medical care, early intervention services, special education services, lost household productivity—associated with preterm births in the U.S. is \$51,600 per child born prematurely. In the first year alone, medical costs for a preterm infant are \$32,325 compared to \$3,325 for an infant born full-term.ⁱ

Low birthweight is the most common cause of infant death in the United States and babies who survive often develop cognitive disabilities, learning problems, cerebral palsy, or vision or hearing disabilities.ⁱⁱ Premature birth is a primary contributor to low birthweightⁱⁱⁱ and between 1990 and 2000, low birthweight increased by 20% in Texas.^{iv} We do not yet know all of the causes of low birthweight, but we know contributing factors include the mother having had a previous premature baby; multiple births; uterine and cervical abnormalities; chronic maternal health problems; smoking, alcohol, or drug use during pregnancy; and low maternal weight gain.^v

***Premature birth has
increased by 36%
since the early 1980s***

Source: Martin, J.A., et al. Births:
Final Data for 2006. National Vital
Statistics Reports.

Evidence indicates Texas is facing a significant problem related to our growing number of premature and low birthweight babies. In 2006, 54,000 babies in Texas were born preterm and 33,000 were born low birthweight.^{vi} To address the rising number of premature and low birthweight births in Texas, HB 2505 would create a continuum of care task force to investigate causes, develop resources, and make recommendations. The task force, comprised of doctors, nurses, non-profits, maternal and child health organizations, and parents would serve two major functions. First, the task force would investigate the causes of rising premature births in Texas and causes of re-hospitalization. Understanding the causes of preterm births would help to better inform providers and policy makers about why the numbers are rising in Texas, and how to best address the problem. Second, the task force would develop different types of educational resources — those for hospitals and providers and those for families. Resources developed by the task force for hospitals and providers would include a standard discharge planning tool designed to help reduce the rate of premature infant re-hospitalization, advance infant outcomes, and contain costs related to re-hospitalization in Texas. Resources developed by the task force for families with a premature infant would include educational materials, planning tools, and information about community resources to help inform families through a challenging time.

Each child brings the promise of a healthier, stronger future for Texas. To make good on that promise, Texas needs to make sure children can grow up healthy, starting with their earliest, most vulnerable years. We thank you for your consideration of HB 2505 and ask you to support the task force that would help improve infant health outcomes in Texas and better inform policy decisions.

Thank you for your time and commitment. If you have any questions, please feel free to contact me or the staff of Texans Care for Children at 512.473.2274.

Respectfully,

Lauren Dimitry
Health Policy Coordinator
Texans Care for Children
ldimitry@txchildren.org

ⁱ *Preterm Birth: Causes, Consequences, and Prevention*, Institute of Medicine, 2006. National Academy Press, Washington, D.C.

ⁱⁱ Frances Deviney and Florencia Gutierrez, *The State of Texas Children: Kids Count Annual Data Book 2008-9, Special Focus: Closing the Educational Gaps*, (Austin: Center for Public Policy Priorities, 2009), www.cppp.org/factbook08.

ⁱⁱⁱ "Why Are Babies Born with Low Birthweight?," March of Dimes, http://www.marchofdimes.com/professionals/14332_1153.asp#head1.

^{iv} Frances Deviney and Florencia Gutierrez, *The State of Texas Children: Kids Count Annual Data Book 2008-9, Special Focus: Closing the Educational Gaps*, (Austin: Center for Public Policy Priorities, 2009), www.cppp.org/factbook08.

^v Frances Deviney and Florencia Gutierrez, *The State of Texas Children: Kids Count Annual Data Book 2008-9, Special Focus: Closing the Educational Gaps*, (Austin: Center for Public Policy Priorities, 2009), www.cppp.org/factbook08.

^{vi} Data is from 2006. "Texas Health Data," Center for Health Statistics, Texas Department of State Health Services, <http://www.dshs.state.tx.us/chs/default.shtm>.