



**Senate Finance Committee
Department of Assistive and Rehabilitative Services
February 1, 2011**

Texans Care for Children is a statewide nonpartisan, nonprofit advocacy organization dedicated exclusively to the children of Texas. We look to our broad base of community-based experts—our partners and 220 members throughout the state who together represent thousands of Texas children—to inform our work and help us in developing our legislative agenda. We also co-convene various stakeholder groups which bring together a wide range of organizations, families, and advocates around our areas of focus, which are: family economic security; infant, child and maternal health; children's mental health; child welfare; and juvenile justice and at-risk youth.

As you consider the appropriations for the Department of Assistive and Rehabilitative Services (DARS), Texans Care urges you to consider the long term costs associated with budget decisions that will result in fewer children aged birth to three with disabilities and developmental delays receiving Early Childhood Intervention (ECI) services.

The ECI Advocacy Coalition has developed guidelines related to ECI in the budget process. I have attached a copy of Guiding Principles to inform you in your decision making.

It is critical for Texas to have an ECI system that reaches children aged birth to three with or at-risk of developmental delays and disabilities, provides the recommended level of services needed to help them reach their potential, and is sustainable.

- Under the proposed budget, 5,800 fewer infants and toddlers would receive ECI services each month.
- Failure to invest in ECI will not only lead to poorer child outcomes, it will increase the long-term costs to the public, as children in need of early intervention but do not receive it re-enter public systems with greater delays and problem severity.ⁱ
- Research shows that most of the dollar benefits of early childhood interventions are reaped by society in reduced public spending in other systems.ⁱⁱ

In a 2009 report, commissioned by the Department of Assistive and Rehabilitative Services (DARS), a broad range of stakeholders developed recommendations on how the state could narrow eligibility for ECI services in the event of decreasing appropriations.ⁱⁱⁱ Along with their recommendations, stakeholders noted how the narrowing of eligibility would result in infants and toddlers losing access to services and provided case scenarios to illustrate the impact of such changes. **An excerpt of this report's case scenarios is attached to this testimony.**

Before making any more cuts to vital services, Texas needs a balanced approach to balancing the state budget. We urge the Legislature to identify all reasonable options for bringing state revenue into alignment with Texans' current and future needs. Here are three ways to meet today's needs in Texas and prepare for a better future:

1. **Use the Rainy Day Fund.** An estimated \$9.4 billion in savings will be available for the next budget from a fund whose constitutional mandate is shoring up state services during economic downturns.
2. **Take advantage of available federal funding.** Texas taxpayers need our state leaders to prioritize bringing our share of federal dollars back to Texas.
3. **Close wasteful tax loopholes, and develop new revenue sources.** The House Ways & Means Committee has been systematically reviewing tax exemptions in order to help the Legislature identify those that are outdated and that can be eliminated without hurting the average taxpayer.

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,

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ⁱ Emerald Consulting. (2009). *A Report to the Texas Early Childhood Intervention (ECI) System Regarding the Stakeholder Task Force Meeting on ECI Eligibility*. http://www.dars.state.tx.us/ecis/eci_eligibility_2008.pdf

ⁱⁱ Shonkoff, J. and D. Phillips. (2000). *Neurons to Neighborhoods: The Science of Early Childhood Development*. National Academy Press, Washington, D.C.

ⁱⁱⁱ Emerald Consulting. (2009). *A Report to the Texas Early Childhood Intervention (ECI) System Regarding the Stakeholder Task Force Meeting on ECI Eligibility*. http://www.dars.state.tx.us/ecis/eci_eligibility_2008.pdf