



Senate Finance Committee

Department of Family and Protective Services

February 3, 2011

Chairman Ogden and members of the Committee, I am Ashley R. Harris with Texans Care for Children. 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.

We wish to provide public comment on the following items in the Department of Family and Protective Services budget as they relate to the highest priority legislative recommendations that Texans Care has developed in conjunction with our state-level and regional partners for the 82nd Legislature:

I. Maintain Prevention Services

Failure to invest in prevention, early intervention, and effective services for children who have experienced abuse or neglect will not only lead to poorer child outcomes, it will increase the long-term costs to the public. States cannot afford to let child abuse and neglect trends continue. In Texas, the direct cost of child abuse and neglect to the child welfare, judicial, law enforcement, mental health, and hospital system was estimated at just over \$1 billion annually in 2007. The indirect cost due to heightened juvenile and adult criminal justice involvement, special education, mental and physical healthcare, substance abuse, and lost productivity to society was over \$5.2 billion. Texas will continue to lose this money as long as its investment in child welfare prevention and early intervention remains insufficient to serve all the families at risk of child maltreatment.ⁱ

The proposed budget cuts of over 55% to current prevention spending would hinder the progress DFPS has made to address prevention and decrease the number of children entering foster care. By investing in prevention, the number of children removed from their home decreases and the financial burden placed on Texas will be reduced. Texans Care for Children recognizes that lawmakers are proposing a deep cut in prevention funding in response to the current economic conditions. In the strongest terms possible, we urge the Legislature to recognize the long-term return on investment of prevention services and to, at a minimum, maintain current resources dedicated to prevention.

II. Maintain caseloads for Family Based Safety Services (FBSS) and Conservatorship (CVS) caseworkers

The Department has clearly identified what caseworkers need in order to serve children on their caseloads; the Legislature should fund this critical function appropriately. DFPS projects it will need additional direct delivery staff in order to maintain current caseloads.ⁱⁱ The proposed budget highlights an increase of cases for FBSS workers. Additionally, SB 1 would eliminate family strengthening services and community based family services that address maltreatment prevention and support the efforts of FBSS workers. These factors endanger the strides CPS has made to decrease the number of children being removed from their home and being placed in foster care.

Maintaining current caseloads for CVS staff will allow caseworkers to do higher quality casework, which benefits children directly through increased safety and better outcomes. Additionally, the state has a fiscal incentive to do well in this area. In past federal reviews, the Department has failed to meet federal standards for caseworker visits and, without continued support, could be subject to financial penalties in these reviews.

III. Provide support for relative caregivers

Kinship placement, when safe for a child, is a best practice, and the Department has made great strides to place children with family when possible and safe. Studies of kinship care in Texas have shown to be a safer and longer lasting placement option for children and tend to influence more positive outcomes for children compared to foster care placements.ⁱⁱⁱ The biggest barriers for families to care for a child are financial. A greater proportion of kinship families live in poverty than non-kin foster families and support is needed to ensure children can be placed with relatives.^{iv} Currently, over 700 Texas children benefit from relative caregiver assistance. The elimination of monetary assistance for relatives, as proposed by SB 1, would force CPS to place many of these children in more costly foster care placements.

Additionally, we urge legislators to keep funding for subsidized daycare for relative caregivers. The proposed 60% decrease in funding for childcare will have a major impact on DFPS' ability to place children with relatives. Without this support, many relatives would be unable to take a child into their home. Childcare is a necessary and costly resource for many working families. Providing relative caregivers with monetary assistance and daycare support is less costly than paying for foster care.

IV. Maintain purchased client services at all stages of services to support more positive outcomes for children and families.

The current budget proposal reduces spending for client services that provide additional therapeutic support and promote permanency for families involved with CPS at all stages of service. Any reductions made to these important services will create a financial burden for the state and will have a direct emotional impact on each family served. Protective daycare is an important client service that helps to ensure a child's safety and reduces the risk of removal from the home. DFPS proposes that an additional 3,428 children would need protective daycare to avoid an increase in removals.^v We support the

request for additional funds needed to provide this service and oppose the proposed 23% reduction in protective daycare because it will increase the number of children exposed to abusive and neglectful environments resulting in more children removed from their homes.

Adoption provides legal and emotional permanency for a child and can improve a child's overall well-being. Services provided during the adoption and post-adoption stages of service facilitate the successful permanent placement of a child. By cutting funding for services provided during the adoption process by 25%, and post-adoption stage of service by more than 33%, the likelihood of an adoption being successful will dramatically decrease. Failed adoptions push children back into the foster care system, adding a financial burden on the state and impacting a child's ability to find emotional and placement stability.

Keeping children safely with their families and in stable placements are two critical functions of the child protection system, and we urge the Legislature to make this investment in our children. Appropriating funds to purchase client services at all stages of services will help children achieve permanency, while saving the state money.

V. Before making any cuts to vital services, Texas needs a balanced approach to balancing the state budget

We ask the Senate 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:

A. 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.

B. Take advantage of available federal funding. Texas taxpayers need our state leaders to prioritize bringing our share of federal dollars back to Texas.

C. 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 *Findings From the 2008-2009 Evaluation of Child Abuse and Neglect Prevention Programs and Services*, (Austin: The Interagency Coordinating Council for Building Healthy Families, 2006), http://www.dfps.state.tx.us/documents/HealthyTxFamilies/2009-12-01_ICC_Report.pdf.

ⁱⁱ Based on DFPS projections in LAR for FTE's needed for population growth.

ⁱⁱⁱ Brooks, D. "Kinship care and substance-exposed children," *The Source*, (1999) pp 1-21. Cited in Teutsch, Norton. "Kinship Care: A National Analysis and a Texas Proposal," (2001).

^{iv} Ehrle, Geen, & Main, "Kinship Foster Care: Custody, Hardships, and Services" *Snapshots of America's Families III* No. 4 (November 2003) The Urban Institute. Available online: <http://www.urban.org/publications/310893.html>

^v Based on DFPS' projections in LAR for investigations.