



## **SB1:**

### **Funding for the Department of Family and Protective Services**

Senate Finance Committee

February 15, 2007

Chairman Ogden and members, I am Jodie Smith, the Public Policy Coordinator at Texans Care For Children. We are a non-profit organization composed of over 120 organizations and individuals working to improve the well being of Texas' children. Texans Care For Children's Board is composed of leaders from across the state representing various sectors including business, church, professional, volunteer and non-profit organizations. We advocate for state and local policy that brings about a better quality of life for the children of our state. Each session, in concert with our membership, we develop a legislative agenda that supports efforts to improve the lives of Texas' children in six areas - child poverty, child health care, child mental health, early care and education, child welfare, and juvenile justice. I appreciate the opportunity to provide comments on SB 1 as it relates to funding for the Department of Family and Protective Services.

**Thank you for addressing the crisis in foster care in 2005. We want you to know that the crisis is not over; it has simply shifted to another part of the system. Please continue the investment that you made last session to keep kids in the state's care safe.**

#### **Conservatorship Caseworkers**

##### **What is the problem concerning funding for conservatorship caseworkers?**

- Texas CPS conservatorship caseloads average 47, even though the Child Welfare League of America recommends caseloads of 12-15.
- Conservatorship workers are responsible for the children who come into the state's care; family-based safety services (FBSS) workers help at-risk families stay together so that children do not have to be removed from their homes.
- During the 79<sup>th</sup> Legislative Session, the Texas Legislature made no appropriation for additional conservatorship and FBSS caseworkers, choosing instead to invest in investigative caseworkers. Many conservatorship and FBSS caseworkers moved to other areas of the agency, leaving their positions unfilled and creating additional work for those who remained.
- In the first three months of 2004, nearly 27 percent of children in foster care did not receive a single caseworker visit, though they should be visited once a month. This is undoubtedly due to high child-to-caseworker ratios.
- Overburdened caseworkers sometimes fail to make appropriate decisions about children in the system, compromising the safety of children in the state's care.

- Because of large caseload burdens, caseworkers burn out. Turnover is very high, at 40% for new caseworkers as of 2005. High turnover translates into a less experienced workforce and greater stress on remaining workers.

#### **What will it cost Texas if we do not invest in conservatorship caseworkers this session?**

- Conservatorship caseworkers will continue to carry the excessive weight of caseloads more than double the national recommended levels.
- It costs the state \$16,983 to train a replacement for each CPS caseworker who quit in 2002 and 2003. With current turnover rates around 40% for new caseworkers, the state bears a heavy cost that it could reduce with more appropriate staffing levels.
- In 2004, 38 foster children died under the state's watch, and in 2005 that number increased to 48 foster children. If we do not provide the resources necessary to devote more attention to all children in the system, we can expect that more children will die.

#### **Child Abuse and Neglect Prevention Funding**

##### **Why is it important to increase prevention funding?**

- Prevention is cheaper than the cure, both in financial and human costs. We know that supporting families early means less child mistreatment, yet we often cut prevention programs first when there are budget problems. By helping children early, we assist them in developing healthy lives, save money in the long run, and build stronger and safer communities.
- Prevention programs were cut drastically during the 2003 budget shortfall. Though partial restoration was made in 2005, growth in the child population and inflation leave the state behind 2003 funding levels for prevention.
- Counties often commit juvenile offenders to the Texas Youth Commission (TYC) due to a lack of resources in the community to help that child. Investing prevention and early intervention dollars at the community level is the key to preventing a child or family's situation from escalating to the point where a child is removed from the home either into foster care or into the juvenile justice system.
- Programs like Community Youth Development (CYD) have been shown to improve outcomes for the children they touch. The Criminal Justice Policy Council (CJPC) evaluated CYD and found that Child Protective Services investigations went down in ZIP codes with CYD programs and that juvenile crime referrals also declined in comparison to areas without CYD programs.
- The Services to At-Risk Youth Program (STAR) also benefits at-risk children. The CJPC found that 80% of program participants reported improvement during follow-up surveys.

##### **What will it cost Texas if we do not invest more in Prevention this session?**

- For each child who is committed to TYC, it costs the state \$96,000.
- For each child who enters the foster care system, it costs the state \$109.38 per day or \$39,785 per year.
- By comparison, it costs \$376 per year to enroll one child in the Community Youth Development program, as of 2001, and \$645 for the STAR program.
- Investing in prevention programs is fiscally smart, since we know that incarceration and foster care are much more expensive than prevention efforts.

**Would SB1 fund DFPS appropriately?**

- No. The Department's LAR original exceptional item request for conservatorship workers was not enough to bring caseloads down from current levels. Without that exceptional item, the Department estimates that caseloads will grow to 54 in 2008 and 58 in 2009. However, the exceptional item funding would only stabilize caseloads at CURRENT levels of 46-47 cases per worker, which is three times the national recommendation. Maintaining the status quo will not keep children safe nor improve foster care outcomes. DFPS has amended its LAR so that it does not currently include an exceptional item for conservatorship workers. We urge the committee to look favorably upon a funding request for this area and to urge DFPS to ask for the amount that it truly needs to keep kids safe. SB1 should be amended to bring conservatorship caseloads down much closer to national standards of 12-15 cases per worker.
- SB1 should also be amended to at least fund prevention services at pre-2003 levels adjusted upward for inflation and growth in the child population. The current bill would continue Texas' backward movement in funding prevention, rather than moving the state forward by investing in our children.

**If you have any questions, please feel free to contact me at 512.473.2274 or visit our website at [www.texanscareforchildren.org](http://www.texanscareforchildren.org).**

Respectfully,  
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