



SB1:

Funding for the Texas Juvenile Probation Commission

Senate Finance Committee

February 1, 2007

Chairman Ogden and members of the Finance Committee, 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 Texas Juvenile Probation Commission.

Why do we need to invest more in juvenile probation programs?

- The Texas Juvenile Probation Commission (TJPC) has not seen an increase in state funding for community programs since 1995, while federal funding for probation programs has decreased 62%.
- The TJPC oversees local juvenile boards that provide community-based juvenile corrections programs. This structure allows juvenile offenders to receive rehabilitative services and remain accountable to their probation officers while staying in their own communities with family support.
- TJPC has seen cost increases and an increase in referrals since 2001. New mandates, such as mental health screening and assessment, have increased costs. Additionally, TJPC is seeing an increase in referrals of violent youth, translating into greater demands on the system.
- Serving kids through probation who would otherwise end up in a Texas Youth Commission (TYC) facility saves the state money and keeps kids in their communities.

What can Texas do?

Fully fund TJPC's request for additional funding so that juveniles receive community-based probation services and avoid entering the more costly and restrictive TYC system.

What will it cost Texas if we don't act this session?

- TJPC estimates a cost impact to TYC of between \$74 million and \$97 million per year if probation funding is cut by 10%. TJPC has several programs that are designed to divert youth from TYC, and if the budget is cut, some of those kids will end up at TYC, which is much more expensive to the state and more restrictive for the kids.
- In human costs, every year 1,735 TYC-eligible youth who could remain under TJPC supervision would not be served. Many of them would end up at TYC facilities. The state would save about \$9 million per year if probation funding is cut by 10%, but the TYC system would feel a cost impact ten times the probation cost savings.
- Investing more dollars in community care for juvenile offenders is a smart fiscal decision on the state's part and a smart investment in our kids.

Does SB1 fund TJPC appropriately?

- No. While SB1 restores some of the cuts TJPC proposed in its LAR, it still cuts the agency's budget by approximately 3% for each year of the coming biennium compared to FY2007 levels.
- SB1 should fully fund TJPC's base request and exceptional item requests. The bill should be amended to include the \$14 million dollars requested by the agency for both FY 2008 and FY 2009 that were not included in SB1. The \$14 million annually would include funding for:
 - Community Corrections that have not had the budget increased since 1995 despite an 18% increase in the juvenile population
 - Staff Salary Equalization and Retention to help the agency retain qualified staff
 - 5 new FTEs, including an abuse/neglect investigator and a mental health practitioner
 - Increases in the daily cost of operating Juvenile Justice Alternative Education Programs (JJAEP)

For the wellbeing of juveniles and for the benefit of Texas taxpayers, please make the fiscally-prudent decision to increase our state's investment in the juveniles on probation during the 80th session.

If you have any questions, please feel free to contact me at 512.473.2274 or visit our website at www.texanscareforchildren.org.

Respectfully,

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