



September 24, 2008

Good afternoon:

I'm here on behalf of the Texas Network of Youth Services, a statewide association for organizations that provide services to youth. We support most of DFPS's budgetary requests, but our organization's primary focus is on preventing child abuse and juvenile delinquency, so today I am to urge you to support Exceptional Item # 11 and increase funding for STAR and CYD.

STAR is a safety net for youth and their families, in times of trouble that they can't handle on their own; it's a safety net that fortunately exists across the state, in all counties. In fiscal year 2007, more than 32,000 youth and their families received services through STAR. Young people and their families come to the STAR Program when they are in crisis; they are at the end of their rope, and they need help now - it can't wait a couple of weeks. We know from the results tracked by DFPS that the youth who are fortunate enough to receive services are highly likely to have positive results. The STAR program is the only prevention program that operates statewide, serving children ages 0-17 and their families, and addressing both child abuse and delinquency prevention. However, while it has a presence in all 254 counties – which is phenomenal considering the budget for STAR - the program is stretched far too thin. As resources are stretched thinner and thinner, the more often this door will be closed to young people who are in crisis; and another child, another family, will slip through the cracks. Slipping through the cracks too often means involvement in the juvenile justice or child welfare system. The financial and emotional costs of involvement in these systems are exorbitant, especially when you consider that it costs less than \$700 to serve a youth and their family through STAR.

The ability of STAR providers to serve youth and families in crisis has diminished over time, due to several factors. First, 10% of STAR funding was previously diverted to Universal Child Abuse Prevention programming. While we obviously support funding for universal programs to prevent child abuse, this change resulted in fewer resources available for the services that make STAR so valuable. Second, the increasing cost of fuel has hit STAR providers hard. Many of them travel hundreds of miles a week to reach out to youth and families across large service areas, particularly in rural areas of our state. Additionally, this year STAR providers must meet a new set of requirements, each of which was intended to promote quality of services and measure the program's impact. While we support requirements to ensure the quality of STAR, additional requirements directly increase the cost of services. Unless additional funding is provided, these new requirements will result in fewer youth and families receiving the services they need.

The CYD Program places a concentration of youth development services in zip code areas that have traditionally experienced high rates of juvenile crime and other risk factors. The program is based on the well-established premise that given the proper supports and opportunities for positive engagement in community life, vulnerable young people can avoid criminal involvement. The

services are planned based on input from community stakeholders, including youth. The program currently operates in only 15 zip code areas, due to funding restraints; the additional funding that DFPS has proposed would allow it to expand to two new zip code areas. While there are far more than two zip code areas with high rates of juvenile crime, this request would represent a much needed step forward.

I urge you to fund Exceptional Item #11 for DFPS. Prevention is a wise investment, and it will keep paying off, for decades into the future!

Thank you,

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Texas Network of Youth Services