



February 12, 2008

Greetings Chairman Ogden, Senate Finance Committee Members:

I'm here on behalf of the Texas Network of Youth Services, a statewide youth services association. TNOYS supports increased funding to strengthen the child welfare system in Texas; we must continue to shore up these essential services and programs. Our top priority for DFPS appropriations is funding for prevention services; specifically the STAR and CYD Programs.

Consider these disturbing facts:

- In 2006 (the most recent year data is available from Texas Juvenile Probation Commission) over 46,000 juveniles were referred to Juvenile Probation as first time offenders.
- In 2006, more than 8,000 Texas youth were in custody in juvenile justice facilities on a daily basis. Of these youth, 61 percent were in custody for non-violent offenses.
- In over 175,000 cases referred to DFPS in 2007, alleged child abuse or neglect went unconfirmed in 2007; many of these families need services and remain at risk for future child abuse or neglect.
- 1.2 million Texas children are at risk for developing some form of mental illness (Code Red), but only 28,445 Texas children received public mental health services last year.¹

These statistics should scare us; especially if we consider that we offer nothing in so many of these instances. Each of these numbers is a child, with a face and a name and a personal story.

Increase Funding for STAR and CYD Programs!

The STAR and CYD Programs at DFPS represent a substantial chunk of this state's efforts to offer a happy ending to these stories. I urge you to fund Exceptional Item #11 for DFPS; totaling \$6.2 million GR.

- \$4.2 million: **10% increase** for Services to At Risk Youth (STAR) Program; to serve 621 additional youth and their families. (Base budget: \$21 million per year)
- \$2 million: **13% increase** for Community Youth Development (CYD) Program; 2 new sites (Base budget: \$7.8 million per year)

Rationale for Increase

1. STAR served 32,163 youth and their families in 2008, while CYD served 18,074; compared to the statistics I presented above, that's barely scraping the surface of the need.
2. The STAR Program has seen no increase since 1998; none in CYD since its inception in 1995.
3. Service capacity in both programs has decreased due to inflation and increased program requirements in both programs.

4. The increase to STAR actually restores funding that was re-allocated for Universal Child Abuse Prevention services, since 2004, effectively reducing funds for direct services to youth and families by 10%.

STAR is the only prevention program that operates statewide, serving children age 0-17 and their families, and addressing both child abuse and delinquency prevention. It is unique in its capacity to address the broad range of issues and needs reflected in my opening statistics. 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.

The return on investment for prevention is sizable. Each teen prevented from becoming a career criminal could save between 1.7 and 2.3 million dollars per youth.ⁱⁱ Based on those figures, if only 10 youth served by STAR last year, or just 4 of those served by CYD, were turned away from crime, the entire cost of the program would have been saved! In fact, over 32,000 youth and their families were served by STAR; and over 18,000 were served by CYD.

Independent evaluation of the STAR Program by the Criminal Justice Policy Council in 2003 found the program to be successful in helping 83% of youth with prior juvenile justice involvement avoid further involvement, one year later. Both the STAR and the CYD Program maintain outcome data on all youth served, with favorable results.

PLEASE make the wise investment of prevention, and it will keep paying off, for decades into the future!

In addition to prevention, TNOYS has several budget priorities related specifically to foster care:

1. Increase the residential foster care reimbursement rate for all provider types (HHSC budget).

Many of our member agencies operate residential programs - emergency shelters, foster homes, basic care facilities, and residential treatment. It is very distressing, when we get the phone call from an agency that has been forced to close facilities, because they just can't survive financially. Others are still holding on; but we're very concerned about more closures if there is no financial relief with the rates. It's an experience that holds true across all levels of care; but we have been especially hearing from emergency shelters, who are facing huge challenges trying to serve young people who sometimes have greater needs that can be addressed well in a shelter setting; so many of these kids end up in shelters because there is nothing available. An increase to the reimbursement rate is simply critical; without it, programs will continue to close, and the state will lose an infrastructure that may be impossible to build back up.

2. Support Exceptional Item # 14 – Strengthen services to youth transitioning from foster care.

Transition Centers offer a vital service to young adults who have left care. We support funding for Transition Centers; but additional funding is needed to support existing Transition Centers as well as seed money for new centers. While the circumstances are unique for each of the current Transition Centers, we hear that many are facing significant loss of funds, as they use up their current “start-up” funds from a variety of other sources. While they will continue efforts to raise funds from other sources, we believe that they need a stable source of on-going base

funding to ensure their continuation. We are therefore asking the Committee to consider an appropriation of \$1 million to provide a minimal funding base for Transitional Centers.

3. Provide systems of wraparound funding and remove barriers to integrated funding at state and local levels.
4. Invest in a technology integration system for more effective data sharing between public and private providers, law enforcement, judges, courts, state agencies and other stakeholders to minimize duplication of services, provide equal access to case information and promote cooperation and efficiencies among stakeholders.

I appreciate the efforts of this committee; children and youth served by DFPS are among the most vulnerable children in our state, and they deserve the best we can offer.

Thank-you,



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ⁱ Children's Campaign

ⁱⁱ Springer, David. Transforming Juvenile Justice in Texas: A Framework for Action. Blue Ribbon Task Force, 2007. 5. 2 July 2008 http://www.utexas.edu/ssw/faculty/springer/e/jjtfr_sept2007.pdf.