



# Agenda for the 83rd Texas Legislative Session

There are nearly 9.5 million young people ages 0-24 in Texas and many are in situations that put them at risk for abuse or neglect, criminal justice system involvement, or homelessness – all of which can be prevented. Texas Network of Youth Services (TNOYS) is a network of community-based organizations and supportive individuals working toward a shared vision of Texas where all young people have access to the resources, support, and opportunities they need to lead healthy and fulfilling lives. We work tirelessly, and in partnership with young people, to promote quality services for youth and families who are facing difficulties.

Critical to the success of TNOYS and our members is our partnership with the State of Texas. We have designed a campaign that invites state leaders and the public to join us in our work to recognize and value the inherent strengths of young people.

## 1. Prevent problems before they start.

The most cost effective way to serve young people and their families is to prevent problems before they start. It is crucial that services and interventions be available to youth and their families before they end up in the foster care, juvenile justice, or criminal justice systems.

## 2. Address normal adolescent behaviors appropriately.

Behaviors including running away from home and failing to attend school may be normal adolescent responses to troubling situations. For example, youth may run away to flee abuse or neglect at home. Truancy may also indicate a challenging home situation, or a need for substance abuse treatment or mental health services. Criminalizing adolescent behaviors is not the most responsible way to address them.

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## 3. Promote safe and nurturing living arrangements for young people who cannot remain at home with their parents.

When the State of Texas determines a child's home environment to be unsafe, he or she may be placed in foster care. Foster care placements come in all different shapes and sizes and may include foster families, relative caregivers, emergency shelters, cottage homes, and more. Other times young people end up needing a place to live before the government gets involved. For example, if they run away from home, or get kicked out. Since every situation is different, it is important that communities are able to offer many safe and nurturing living arrangements for youth who cannot remain at home with their parents.

## 4. Support young people during the transition to adulthood.

Growing up is hard work, especially when you are on your own. Being successful requires completing school, getting a job, staying out of trouble, and learning skills like using money wisely and paying bills on time. Young adults in at-risk situations such as foster care and homelessness are just as capable of meeting these milestones as their peers, but they need access to resources, support, and opportunities.

## 5. Work in partnership with youth.

TNOYS respects and values the resiliency, capability, and insight of youth and strives to always work in partnership with young people. Involving youth in decisions is crucial to ensure that they have access to the resources, opportunities, and support they need to lead healthy and fulfilling lives.

