



Invest in Strategies that Keep Families Together Safely & Promote the Well-Being of Youth when in Foster Care

Testimony to House Appropriations Subcommittee on Article II

March 2, 2020

Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony on the Department of Family and Protective Services' (DFPS) for the '22-'23 biennium as proposed in HB 1. With an understanding that the legislature and budget writers are working with a budget shortfall and are facing many tough decisions, TNOYS strongly recommends the legislature increase funding in the DFPS budget for Prevention and Early Intervention services to prevent abuse and neglect; use state dollars efficiently and maximize federal funds that Texas can draw down to implement the Families First Prevention Services Act (FFPSA) and provide a daily rate increase for foster care to ensure that the state has appropriate capacity to serve youth and youth in care are receiving quality care and the supports they need.

Prioritize Prevention and Early Intervention Services that Keep Families Together Safely

Prevention and Early Intervention (PEI) services support Texas youth and families in crisis, experiencing conflict, and recovering from trauma. They have a proven record of keeping children safe and families together by preventing abuse and neglect. The COVID-19 pandemic has created significant trauma and stress for Texas youth and families and will continue to amplify the need for prevention services for years to come.

The DFPS' \$10 million exceptional item request for increased PEI funding will allow the state to proactively help in addressing the traumas of the pandemic and prevent the projected increase in abuse.

Family and Youth Success (FAYS, formerly known as Services To At Risk Youth or STAR) is the only prevention program available in all of Texas' 254 counties and is the only statewide program that provides free counseling services for youth through age 18 and families without a serious mental illness diagnosis.

FAYS providers support youth and families in crisis through counseling and crisis intervention, as well as connection to resources that reduce financial burdens for families who are experiencing housing instability, job loss or employment instability.

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Proactively addressing the traumas of the pandemic, increasing mental health–related emergencies, and family crises through the FAYS/STAR program will decrease the likelihood that these issues will develop into abuse, neglect or juvenile delinquency and lead to further systems involvement.¹

Recognizing that the current economic climate also places a great deal of stress on the state’s budget, TNOYS recommends that the Legislature continues to invest in preventative strategies that will prove to be a cost saving for the state and support Texas families in the long term. As the Director’s statement in the LAR notes, PEI programming offers “a cost-effective alternative to foster care by preventing maltreatment before a child is abused, neglected or separated from their family.” Basic foster care services for a child costs \$1,496 per month. Programming provided by FAYS/STAR, however, costs \$943.62 annually.

Maximize Federal Funding through Family First Prevention Services Act

DFPS drafted a strategic plan for implementation of the Family First Prevention Services Act, providing options for the legislature to choose the path for implementation. We encourage the Legislature to maximize federal matching dollars available through FFPSA implementation. With a tight budget, the legislature should be looking to pull down all possible matching funds from the federal government to support youth in foster care or to prevent youth from entering foster care.

Particularly these investments should include:

- **Increase funding to prevent foster care involvement and keep families together through approved programs.** Funding should also be used to increase the availability of approved programs throughout the state in order to maximize federal matching funds and evidence-based programs available to families. Investments in preventing foster care involvement will not only support Texas children and families but will also create long-term savings for the state of Texas by keeping families out of long-term, costly system involvement.
- **Expand capacity for FFPSA Prevention In-Home Parenting Programs.** Given the current mental health and financial stressors on children and families alike, expanding the existing evidence-based in-home parenting programs will provide additional supports and healthy coping skills. These programs have been shown to decrease the likelihood of children’s entrance into foster care by increasing the parents’ protective capacity—a win-win for children, families, and the state.
- **Fund capacity building to increase placement options for placements and special populations that would be eligible to receive matching Title IV-E funds for the placement, including:**
 - treatment foster care,
 - Supervised Independent Living and Transitional Living Programs for youth in extended foster care,

¹ In the budget bill and the DFPS LAR, the FAYS program is still referred to as “Services to At Risk Youth.” DPFS changed the name of the program in 2020.

- o placements and foster family homes for youth who have experienced or are at high risk of sexual exploitation/trafficking, and
- o placements and foster family homes for pregnant, parenting, and post-partum youth.

Promote Quality Foster Care Placements by Increasing Daily Rate

As directed by the Legislature in 2019, the Health and Human Services Commission recently contracted out for a study to look at the methodology used to determine the daily rate the state pays to place youth in foster family homes and in congregate care. The overall recommendation from the study was “we recommend significant modifications to the current processes for developing those rates to better align rates to the cost of care.” ***TNOYS strongly recommends that the legislature include daily rate increases in the DFPS budget, looking at the recommendations from the analysis to determine more appropriate rates.***

The current daily rates do not cover costs to meet the needs of youth in care, and the state is at high risk of losing quality providers because the current rate is not sustainable. Residential providers, across the continuum of services, report an inability to hire and retain quality staff because they cannot afford to pay appropriate wages. Increases in the daily rate will allow the state to build capacity to serve children with the highest needs in therapeutic settings and well-equipped foster homes, prevent disruptions in placements and provide a high quality direct care workforce.

Currently, many providers fundraise a large portion of their budgets in order to sustain their services. However, some providers are more successful at fundraising than others. This difference in funding opportunities further heightens the discrepancy of care children receive.

TNOYS and our members look forward to working with legislators to ensure those working on the frontlines to support youth in care have the resources to do it well.

About Texas Network of Youth Services

Texas Network of Youth Services (TNOYS) is a statewide member network that strengthens services and supports for youth and families. We share a vision of Texas where all youth and young adults are valued, their strengths are recognized, their voices are heard and respected, and they have access to the resources and support they need to succeed.

TNOYS’ systems-change work spans policy advocacy on behalf of young people and those that serve them, partnerships with youth and young adults, and training and capacity building to ensure that organizational and frontline staff are fully equipped to meet the complex needs of youth and families.

To effectively engage youth and young adult leaders across Texas, TNOYS established the Young Adult Leadership Council (YALC). The YALC is a 9-month leadership development program for youth and young adults ages 16 to 25 who have experience with foster care, homelessness, juvenile justice system involvement, or other at-risk situations, and who have a demonstrated interest in or potential for leadership or advocacy.

For more Information:
Lauren Rose
Director of Public Policy
lrose@tnoys.org
512.775.7745