



Texas Alliance of Child and Family Services (TACFS) 86th Legislative Session Priorities

Every day, Texas serves tens of thousands of children, youth, and families that experience trauma from abuse, neglect, domestic violence, substance abuse, poverty, and more. TACFS is a network of caregivers that are embracing the call to serve at-risk Texans. TACFS members work directly with children and families to provide care designed to give children, youth and families with a safe place to live, therapeutic services to help them heal, and connection to community so that they may thrive. Our members are proud to provide an array of services throughout the state of Texas on behalf of local, state and federal government partners.

Recognizing that most of the direct services for children, youth, and families in the child welfare system are delivered by community partner organizations, we recommend supporting services for children, youth, and families in a manner that targets desired outcomes, particularly for **quality services** and **capacity growth** that meets the specific needs of every child and family.

- **Maintain and increase funding for community-based prevention and early intervention programs** to safely and effectively prevent abuse and neglect before it happens and state intervention is needed. We strongly recommend that the Legislature do not take any suggested cuts to Prevention and Early Intervention (PEI) in order to reduce the Department of Family and Protective Services' (DFPS) budget, and we request support of the DFPS Legislative Appropriations Request (LAR) to maintain and increase funding to for PEI. We additionally request resources needed to implement the recommendations of the PEI Task Force, per HB 1549 (85th Legislature).
- **Review and adjust the foster care rate methodology** by considering the results of an independent review and make recommendations to adjust the current rate methodology to more accurately capture the changing needs of foster care. The recommendations will consider quality measures, best practices, and efforts to grow capacity and improve services, care, and support given to foster children and families.
- **Fund family preservation and family reunification** in a way that grows community partner organization capacity to serve more families with effective programs that help keep children safe in their own homes, address trauma, and to prevent ongoing Child Protective Services (CPS) intervention.
- **Increase funding for organizations serving children and youth in the foster care system** to better support permanency and/or successful transitions to independent living. While the aim is always to care for children in a home, these organizations remain a critical part of our continuum of services, working to provide care and services that heal trauma and provide opportunities for each child to reach their full potential. For example:
 - *Child Placing Agencies* must build and maintain capacity as well as provide oversight and support of homes to serve the growing volume and complexity of needs of children in the foster care system;

- *Emergency Shelters* often support sibling groups staying together and intact while waiting for a foster home;
 - *General Residential Operations and Residential Treatment Centers* often provide critical in-patient therapeutic services until a child can step down to a less restrictive environment; and
 - *Supervised Independent Living (SIL)* facilities offer important supports to children aging out of care while also equipping them with skills to live successfully on their own.
*Specific funding recommendations are forthcoming
- **Support DFPS' increase to post-adoption and post-permanency programs.** This support may be critical for families and an opportunity for the state to better support these families and decrease the risk for disruption, particularly for those families that adopt higher needs children. And, consider evaluating the way post-adopt services are contracted/deployed to ensure best value and effectiveness of the funding.
 - **Support DFPS' recommendation for the continuation and expansion of community based (foster) care (CBC).**
 - Continue the phased implementation of CBC, as per SB 11 and guidance from the 85th Legislature.
 - Ensure that with the continuation of CBC, the State invests in smart, interoperable data systems that will further support CBC and enable innovation. Adopt a model of data compliance, interoperability and continue to improve the State's IT system with the goal of direct access by contracted providers in order to improve accountability and reduce duplication and manual data entry.
 - Align the family preservation (FBSS) pilots into the CBC model, with performance-based contracting and clearly established performance measures.
 - **Continue to improve access to and utilization of Medicaid services.** When a child comes in to foster care, it is essential to quickly identify any issues and provide the right services and care.
 - **Improve utilization of screenings and assessments** to better identify concerns, provide the right services, and make the right placements
 - **Support efforts that care for children with complex needs**, including:
 - Improved access to service coordination
 - Intensive out-patient substance use treatment programs
 - Psychiatric diversion programs
 - Targeted case management and MH Rehab
 - **Support HHSC's effort to implement SB 1208 (Schwertner – 85R).** The implementation of SB 1208 will allow organizations that care for children the opportunity to provide a continuum of services that will serve the unique needs of each child as well the ability to innovate and better serve specialized populations such as sex trafficking victims.
 - **Determine the State's direction to comply on federal legislation, Family First Prevention Services Act (FFPSA).** Consider ways to fully maximize the availability of funding for prevention services, grow preventative services capacity, and meet the overall objectives of the FFPSA that are in line with the goals of the federal legislation and the direction Texas is already heading with our own improvement efforts set forth by the Texas Legislature.