

## **Texas Council of Child Welfare Boards**

Established in 1978, the Texas Council of Child Welfare Boards (TCCWB) is a nonprofit organization with a mission to support a statewide network of volunteers concerned with the welfare of children, especially those suffering from abuse and neglect. Led by a board of directors representing 11 regional councils and 193 county child welfare boards, we are a testament to the power of collaboration. To strengthen the Department of Family and Protective Services Child Protective Services program at the county level, the child welfare boards provide local funding, collaboration, advocacy, and community awareness. They are instrumental in bringing community involvement and investment in protective services for children and families. As an organization dedicated to the welfare of children, we are deeply committed to improving the Texas Child Welfare system. Informed by our work at the local level, we present the following recommendations. These proposals are not just about improving the system but about safeguarding the future of our children and families, and we invite you to be a part of this journey.

### **Legislative Priorities for the 89th (2025) Session**

#### **a. Amending the Child Welfare Board Statute in the Texas Family Code**

264.005 (a) to allow any county with a population of less than 500,000 to accept board membership requests from persons from any of their contiguous counties, limiting outside county memberships to no more than one-third of the total Child Welfare Board membership. We specifically support HB 1320 (Schoolcraft).

#### **b. Implementing the federal Families First Prevention Services Act**

**(FFPSA)** is a significant opportunity for the Department of Family and Protective Services (DFPS) to enhance the Family Based Safety Services. This act enables the provision of evidence-based services for substance abuse disorder, mental health, and in-home parenting and skills-building services for families in their own homes and relative homes for up to twelve months with Title IVE Foster Care Funds. Currently, Texas is using Family First Transition Act Dollars that expire in October 2025 for pilots with Community-Based Care Providers and, more recently, Harris Center for Mental Health and IDD. These pilots have shown progress in helping families stay together and avoid foster care. In this process, the role of child welfare boards is pivotal. They are not just passive recipients of funds but active contributors, assisting DFPS with funds and resources for families involved in the system. We strongly advocate for DFPS and the SSCCs to collaborate with their local welfare boards for assistance with emergency needs for families receiving evidence-based services to prevent the removal of children. TCCWB supports the DFPS request for general revenue (GR) funding to sustain the pilots. At the same time, however, the state must submit the Title IV-E Prevention Plan and invest state funding in eligible evidence-based prevention services.

**c. Recruiting and supporting kinship and relatives placements.** Kinship placements can significantly improve children's outcomes and experiences by keeping them closer

to their communities and support systems. Kinship caregivers face challenges that can disrupt or prevent placements. Texas should do more to support a kin-first culture, which values kin placements as the first and best placement for children if they cannot remain with their parent(s). TCCWB supports the priority in the DFPS LAR for increased funding to expand the populations of relative care placements who can receive daycare support year-round. TCCWB also supports the DFPS priority request for additional funding to continue and expand the capacity for SSCCs to provide behavioral health support and services specifically to children and caregivers in kinship placements. County Child Welfare Boards can offer concrete items and support to kinship caregivers.

**d. Advocate funding of community-based care** efforts and continued expansion into the remaining legacy catchments to enhance the quality and capacity of the foster care system. We emphasize the role of Statewide Standards for Community Collaboration (SSCCs), which are used to work with local child welfare boards, where available, to develop preliminary and ongoing community engagement plans. The partnership between SSCCs and local child welfare boards is crucial for the success of Community Based Care. TCCWB supports the priority request from DFPS in the LAR to request resources for the continued expansion of CBC for four new stage I areas (7A, 7B, 11A, 11B) and four new stage II areas (6A, 6B, 7A, 8A) in addition to sustaining and annualizing funding for existing CBC areas. TCCWB further supports the DFPS request for funding to contract with a 3<sup>rd</sup> party entity to independently evaluate the fiscal and performance outcomes of SSCCs.

**e. Support for youth transitioning from the state child welfare** system to interdependent living. Preparation for Adult Living (PAL) contractors have received decreased funding over the last two biennia. TCCWB supports the DFPS priority request in the LAR to restore the General Revenue (GR) funding to draw down federal funding for Transitional Living Services that support older foster youth to ensure that proper supportive housing is available for youth transitioning out of foster care. TCCWB also supports the priority request for pilot enhanced services and supports for high acuity youth to provide targeted interventions with youth aged 16+ placed in congregate care or at risk of becoming a child without placement (CWOP). Texas should increase rates and work to expand capacity in supervised independent Living (SIL) and Transitional living programs (TLP) as well as Preparation for Adult Living (PAL) activities, including pre-college events and activities. Additionally, maximize utilization of the Foster Youth Independence (FYI) Vouchers. The legislature should also ensure that state schools honor the Tuition Waiver and do not try to encourage using PELL Funding and other financial aid.

**f. Stabilize and Retain the DFPS workforce** by supporting the DFPS priority request in the LAR to address salary compression and entry-level support staff salaries and improve pay disparity for case workers across programs. If this targeted salary request is funded, DFPS is requesting existing SSCC contractors receive additional resources. TCCWB further supports the request to strengthen employee retention through an ongoing merit program.

Contact: George Ford

Director, TCCWB, [gford@tccwb.org](mailto:gford@tccwb.org)

713.725.2115