



Lifespan Respite Services

Senate Health and Human Services Committee

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Chairwoman Nelson and members, I am Jodie Smith, Public Policy Director of Texans Care For Children. Thank you for this opportunity to provide testimony today. Texans Care for Children is a statewide nonpartisan, nonprofit advocacy organization dedicated exclusively to the children of Texas. We look to our broad base of community-based experts—our members and partners who together represent thousands of Texas children—to inform our work and help us in developing our legislative agenda. These partners have empowered Texans Care to mobilize coalition groups to work together towards common solutions to the difficult conditions many Texas children and youth face and to assist local communities in advocating for their own children's needs. Our areas of focus are: family economic security; infant, child and maternal health; children's mental health; child welfare; and juvenile justice and at-risk youth.

HB 802

We wish to state our support for HB 802 by Davis, which would create a lifetime respite services program. This program would provide respite for caretakers of individuals with serious chronic health condition or disabilities requiring regular medical care and assistance with basic, daily living activities.

Respite services would include in-home support services to provide temporary relief to a family member. The Department of Aging and Disability Services would contract with community organizations or local government entities to provide respite services and help facilitate access to those services through increased public awareness and maintaining of a respite service provider registry. DADS would also provide vouchers for respite services to caregivers otherwise ineligible for services.

The availability of respite services provides caretakers with rest and an opportunity to address their own basic needs, which are often neglected in the service of the child who is ill or has a disability. The opportunity to access respite services can often make the difference in terms of a family determining whether or not they can continue caring for a child in their home. The ability to maintain a child in the home rather than in an institution has been shown to have an exponential benefit to the child, family and community, while also avoiding the high costs of outside residential facilities.

It is estimated that children with disabilities are 3.76 times more likely to be victims of neglect, 3.79 times more likely to be physically abused, and 3.88 times more likely to experience emotional abuse than children without disabilities. Respite has been shown to be an effective intervention and improves family functioning and family attitudes toward the individual with a disability.ⁱ It is a service endorsed by both the Child Welfare League of America and the National Child Abuse Coalition.

The challenge for families lies in the fact that communities offer a variety of respite arrangements – neighbors and other babysitters, as well as more formal services like drop-in centers, recreational camps and specialized services— of varying levels of quality and cost, and sometimes with limited capacity or availability. This bill if passed would increase family awareness of respite care, link families to available services and provide support and incentive for the development of more respite services. This invaluable linkage would support families facing challenges and empower them to continue to care for their family member who has high needs.

Nebraska, Oklahoma, Oregon, and Wisconsin have all recently implemented lifespan respite programs.

Thank you again for your time and commitment. If you have any questions, please feel free to contact me or the staff of Texans Care For Children at 512.473.2274.

Respectfully,

Jodie Smith
Public Policy Director
Texans Care For Children

ⁱ *Child Abuse & Neglect, Volume 24, Issue 10, October 2000, Pages 1275-1288*
Patricia M. Sullivan, John F. Knutson