



**Early Childhood Advisory Committee
October 20, 2010**

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 partners and 220 members throughout the state who together represent thousands of Texas children—to inform our work and help us in developing our legislative agenda. We also co-convene various stakeholder groups which bring together a wide range of organizations, families, and advocates around our areas of focus, which are: family economic security; infant, child and maternal health; children’s mental health; child welfare; and juvenile justice and at-risk youth.

Texans Care for Children testified before the Legislative Budget Board (LBB) on the **shortsighted nature and long-term consequences of failing to invest in ECI** and has strongly recommended that **before making any cuts to vital services, the state needs a balanced approach to balancing the state budget**. We urged the LBB to identify all reasonable options for bringing state revenue into alignment with Texans' current and future needs, including using the Rainy Day Fund, taking advantage of available federal funding, and closing wasteful tax loopholes and developing new revenue sources. We will continue to work with legislative leadership advocating for a balanced approach to balancing the state budget.

We are concerned with the Department of Assistive and Rehabilitative Services (DARS) recommendation to the LBB to significantly narrow eligibility for ECI services to serve only those young children with the most significant delays or disabilities. We appreciate the Department’s desire to improve the level of services to those children who might be called by some as having the “most need”, especially in the face of inadequate resources. However, such a policy change will prevent thousands of young children from receiving services and supports that may otherwise prevent them from needing more intensive, more expensive supports as their delays become more entrenched.

We are especially concerned that the narrowing of eligibility will result in the failure of young children with social and emotional concerns, which are often more difficult to identify, to receive services which can prevent future challenges in school. Children with serious emotional disturbance face significant challenges as they grow:

- Students with serious emotional disturbance have lower grades and miss more days of school than any other group of students with disabilities.ⁱ
- The co-occurrence of serious emotional disturbance and other disabilities may intensify students’ behavioral problems and further worsen their academic performance.ⁱⁱ
- 50% of students with serious emotional disturbances drop out of school nationwide.ⁱⁱⁱ
- 73% of students with serious emotional disturbance who drop out of school are arrested within five years of leaving school.^{iv}

School-aged children with serious emotional disturbance are already under-identified for special education services. In 2009, just over 30,000 students between the ages of 6 and 21 received special education services in Texas due to emotional disturbance.^v Yet, the Texas Department of State Health Services estimates there to be more than 167,000 children between the ages of 9 and 17 in Texas with a mental illness serious enough to interfere with their functioning at home or school.^{vi}

Texans Care for Children asks the Committee to consider the long-term implications of policy decisions that result in young children with less apparent delays and disabilities, such as social and emotional developmental concerns, from being identified and served. Without early intervention, many young children will ultimately require more intensive and costly services, entering the public system at a later date with a greater delay, likely at an increased cost and intensity of service.^{vii} Research shows that most of the dollar benefits of early childhood interventions are reaped by society in reduced public spending in other systems.^{viii} While ECI's purview is on the zero to three population, as good stewards of public resources, the Committee must consider the impacts its recommendations have on other state systems, as well as the long-term success of the young children it serves.

Thank you 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,

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ⁱ Chesapeake Institute. (1994). *National Agenda for Achieving Better Results for Children and Youth with Serious Emotional Disturbance*. Prepared for U.S. Department of Education Office of Special Education and Rehabilitative Services Office of Special Education Programs. <http://cecp.air.org/resources/ntlagend.asp>

ⁱⁱ Center for Effective Collaboration and Practice. *Students with Emotional Disturbance*. American Institutes for Research <http://cecp.air.org/resources/20th/intro.asp>

ⁱⁱⁱ The President's New Freedom Commission on Mental Health. (2003) *Achieving the Promise: Transforming Mental Health Care in America*

^{iv} Center for Effective Collaboration and Practice. *Students with Emotional Disturbance*. American Institutes for Research <http://cecp.air.org/resources/20th/intro.asp>

^v Texas Education Agency. *The Special Education Databook*. Accessed May 12, 2010. <http://tuna.tea.state.tx.us/Tea.DataBook.Web/Forms/Default.aspx>

^{vi} Texas Department of State Health Services. (2009) *FY 2009 State Plan for Community Mental Health Services Block Grant Application*.

^{vii} Emerald Consulting. (2009). *A Report to the Texas Early Childhood Intervention (ECI) System Regarding the Stakeholder Task Force Meeting on ECI Eligibility*. http://www.dars.state.tx.us/ecis/eci_eligibility_2008.pdf

^{viii} Shonkoff, J. and D. Phillips. (2000). *Neurons to Neighborhoods: The Science of Early Childhood Development*. National Academy Press, Washington, D.C.