



**Texas Legislative Budget Board Hearing
Department of Assistive and Rehabilitative Services
September 2, 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.

As you examine the budget requests for the Department of Assistive and Rehabilitative Services (DARS), Texans Care urges you to consider the long term costs associated with budget decisions which require the narrowing of eligibility for young children with disabilities and developmental delays to receive Early Childhood Intervention (ECI) services.

Failure to invest in ECI will not only lead to poorer child outcomes, it will increase the long-term costs to the public, as these children re-enter public systems with greater delays and problem severity. Changes in ECI eligibility will result in some children who need early intervention service not qualifying for ECI and re-entering the public system at a later date with a greater delay, likely at an increased cost and intensity of service.ⁱ Research shows that most of the dollar benefits of early childhood interventions are reaped by society in reduced public spending in other systems.ⁱⁱ

Before making any cuts to vital services, Texas needs a balanced approach to balancing the state budget. We urge the Legislative Budget Board to identify all reasonable options for bringing state revenue into alignment with Texans' current and future needs. Here are three ways to meet today's needs in Texas and prepare for a better future:

1. **Use the Rainy Day Fund.** An estimated \$8 billion in savings will be available for the next budget from a fund whose constitutional mandate is shoring up state services during economic downturns.
2. **Take advantage of available federal funding.** Texas taxpayers need our state leaders to prioritize bringing our share of federal dollars back to Texas.
3. **Close wasteful tax loopholes, and develop new revenue sources.** The House Ways & Means Committee has been systematically reviewing tax exemptions this interim in order to help the Legislature identify those that are outdated and that can be eliminated without hurting the average taxpayer.

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 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

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