



## **HB 3108: Child Welfare Caseloads**

House Human Services Committee

April 12, 2007

Thank you, Chairman Rose and members, for taking testimony today from Texans Care For Children. We are a non-profit organization composed of over 120 organizations and individuals working to improve the well-being of Texas' children. Texans Care For Children's Board is composed of leaders from across the state representing various sectors including business, church, professional, volunteer and non-profit organizations. We advocate for state and local policy that brings about a better quality of life for the children of our state. Each session, in concert with our membership, we develop a legislative agenda that supports efforts to improve the lives of Texas' children in six areas: child poverty, child health care, child mental health, early care and education, child welfare, and juvenile justice. I appreciate the opportunity to provide information to you today about important current issues in Child Protective Services.

### **What is the problem concerning Child Welfare caseloads?**

- Conservatorship workers are responsible for the children who come into the state's care. Texas CPS conservatorship caseloads currently average 45, even though the Child Welfare League of America recommends caseloads of 12-15 and the national average is approximately 24.
- During the 79<sup>th</sup> Legislative Session, the Texas Legislature made no appropriation for additional conservatorship caseworkers, choosing instead to invest in investigative caseworkers. Many conservatorship caseworkers moved to other areas of the agency, leaving their positions unfilled and creating additional work for those who remained.
- In the first three months of 2004, nearly 27 percent of children in foster care did not receive a single caseworker visit, though the federal requirement is that 90% of children in the state's care should be visited in person once a month. Texas' poor performance in this area is undoubtedly due to high child-to-caseworker ratios.
- Overburdened caseworkers sometimes fail to make appropriate decisions about children in the system, compromising the safety of children in the state's care.
- Because of large caseload burdens, caseworkers burn out. Turnover is very high, at 40% for new caseworkers as of 2005. High turnover translates into a less experienced workforce and greater stress on remaining workers.

### **What will it cost Texas if we do not invest in conservatorship caseworkers this session?**

- Conservatorship caseworkers will continue to carry the excessive weight of caseloads more than double the national recommended levels.
- It costs the state \$16,983 to train a replacement for each CPS caseworker who quit in 2002 and 2003. With current turnover rates around 40% for new caseworkers, the state bears a heavy cost that it could reduce with more appropriate staffing levels.
- In 2004, 38 foster children died under the state's watch, and in 2005 that number increased to 48 foster children. If we do not provide the resources necessary to devote more attention to all children in the system, we can expect that more children will die.

### **What can Texas do?**

In its Legislative Appropriation Request, the Department of Family and Protective Services estimated that conservatorship caseloads will grow to 54 in 2008 and 58 in 2009. DFPS laid out an exceptional item in its budget request to continue CPS Reforms. The proposal would lower conservatorship caseloads to 41 by FY 2009, as reflected in the House Committee Substitute of HB 1 (CSHB 1), the appropriations bill. While that is a positive step, it does not go far enough to keep kids in the state's care safe. Funding for caseworkers should be increased and language should be added to the Family Code to require that conservatorship caseloads be lowered much closer to the national average of 24 cases.

### **Does HB 3108 sufficiently address caseloads?**

Yes, HB 3108 would bring conservatorship, Family-Based Safety Services, and Foster and Adoptive caseloads down to 17 cases per caseworker, which is mid-way between the Child Welfare League of America recommendation and the national average. Texans Care supports this as a fundamental component of improving the child welfare system in Texas. However, with the current status of conservatorship caseloads projected to be 41 by FY 2009, the goals in HB 3108 may not be politically or practically realistic in the short run. Texans Care recommends that the committee vote for a bill that would bring caseloads down significantly from the current CSHB 1 goal of 41 by FY 2009 and that it phase in the lower caseload limits over time in a manner that is politically, practically, and financially achievable.

Respectfully,  
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