



House Human Services
SB 681: Taskforce to study assessments of children in the child welfare system
May 17, 2011

Members, I am Ashley Harris with Texans Care for Children, a statewide nonprofit organization dedicated exclusively to improving the lives of Texas children through policy change. We look to our broad base of community-based experts—our partners and 147 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 that 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.

Texans Care for Children fully supports SB 681 by Senator West. The bill would establish a taskforce to address behavioral assessments used in the child welfare system. The taskforce would consist of multiple and diverse stakeholders that work with children in foster care. Additionally, the taskforce would provide a list of tools for providers to use when conducting behavioral assessments and guidelines for the contents provided in reports.

Currently, the Department of Family and Protective Services uses developmental, psychological and psychiatric testing to assess the needs of children in foster care. These assessments are critical because judges, caseworkers, and providers use the information from these assessments to determine what services are needed, medications prescribed, and appropriate placement for children.ⁱ It is important that the assessment process is evaluated to ensure testing is evidence based and recommendations are most appropriate for the child and those providing services to the child. The appropriate provision of services and appropriate first placement of a child has shown to have a lasting impact on a child’s likelihood of success within and after involvement with the child welfare system.^{ii iii}

In the fall 2009, Partners in Child Protection Reform, a forum facilitated by Texans Care for Children developed a group to focus on behavioral assessments for children involved with child protective services. The Assessment Improvement Circle, in part comprised of providers and provider associations who rely on the information provided in assessments to provide foster children, identified improvement of the assessment process as an area of priority having experienced challenges in making use of many evaluation reports. SB 681 supports the efforts of the Assessment Improvement Circle and if passed, Texans Care for Children will provide any support needed to ensure the creation of a taskforce is successful.

This bill recognizes the need to appropriately evaluate the assessments used in the child welfare system to better support the needs of children in foster care. We believe that this bill has the potential to ensure that children in the system are more quickly matched with the services they need, are more often placed in appropriate settings and are not assessed and reassessed at great cost when doing so is not warranted. We ask for you to support the passage of SB 681. Thank you again for your time. If you have any questions, please feel free to contact me at 512.473.2274.

Thank you,
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ⁱ “Section 8242: Evaluation,” Child Protective Services Handbook, Texas Department of Family and Protective Services,
http://www.dfps.state.tx.us/handbooks/CPS/Files/CPS_pg_8242.jsp#CPS_8242.

ⁱⁱ Placement Stability in Child Welfare Services: Issues, Concerns, Outcomes, and Future Directions Literature Review, (Davis, CA: The Center for Human Services, The University of California, Davis, Extension, August 2008),
<http://www.dss.cahwnet.gov/cfsweb/res/pdf/PlacementStability.pdf>.

ⁱⁱⁱ “CWLA Statement on Optimal Child Welfare Service Delivery,” Child Welfare League of America,
<http://www.cwla.org/advocacy/financingoptimaldeliv.htm>.