



CHILD
PROTECTION
ROUNDTABLE

The Child Protection Roundtable

Austin, Texas

The Child Protection Roundtable is a consortium of more than 70 child welfare member organizations statewide. Members share a child-centered common vision and seek to leverage data, resources and strategy to collaboratively build a better future for the children of Texas.

August 9, 2021

Governor Greg Abbott
Lieutenant Governor Dan Patrick
Speaker Dade Phelan
Members of the Texas Senate & Texas House of Representatives
State Capitol
1100 Congress Avenue
Austin, Texas 78701

Subject: Support for Funding for Attracting and Retaining Private Foster Care Providers

Dear Gov. Abbott, Lt. Gov. Patrick, Speaker Phelan, Senators and Representatives:

In recent memory, there has never been a more important time for state leaders to support children in foster care who do not have a safe place to live or the services they need to heal. Our foster care system is in crisis. State leaders must tackle the severe shortage of safe foster homes so children can be with a loving family, healthy, stay safe, and receive services they need for complex mental health needs. To accomplish this goal, we must support the providers who bear the responsibility for developing and supporting foster homes and other foster care placements. The funding proposal jointly advanced by DFPS and the provider community should help address the urgent need for more foster homes and appropriate services. We urge you to ensure the state fully funds this proposal, which is essential if Texas leaders do not want our children living in a CPS office, an unlicensed home, or a potentially unsafe group facility—or shipped to a foster care facility hundreds of miles away in another state.

We are grateful to the Governor for adding this subject to the call for special session and to the bipartisan majority of members of both houses who have wonderfully supported many of our Roundtable priorities over past sessions. During the 87th regular session, this Legislature passed many significant policy reforms aimed at making foster care safer for kids, but those reforms may be undermined by inadequate investment in the providers directly serving our most vulnerable children.

Our Roundtable has embarked on a series of conversations around the growing shortage of foster homes and services often referred to as the “capacity crisis” and its underlying causes. A few things have become clear to us through these early efforts. First, those root causes are complex and multi-faceted. Texas relies heavily on an extensive network of nonprofit community organizations to provide direct care to children in the child protection system and to build capacity and enhance quality in the system. This work is challenging enough in normal times, but the added and compounding pressures on the system that include the lingering effects of the

Steering Committee

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pandemic, the ongoing impacts of the federal lawsuit on the regulatory environment, and the strong economic recovery that makes attracting and retaining a highly qualified workforce very challenging, are all contributing to the growing magnitude of the crisis.

Second, the crisis is especially severe with respect to older children with high acuity needs such as complex traumas that trigger responses including physical aggression and self-harm, for whom appropriate placements are more difficult to secure. We want to be clear that these youth need treatment for their trauma – not blame for being without placement that only serves to re-traumatize, and certainly not criminalization of their trauma responses that further diminishes their opportunity to go on to lead productive and fulfilling adult lives.

Third, the crisis demonstrates that we are not doing nearly enough to keep children safe by supporting families before CPS involvement is necessary. Access to safe, high-quality childcare and health care access are a couple of examples of ways to support Texas families. Further, within DFPS, Texas should do more on the front end of the system to prevent child maltreatment by expanding programs presently managed by the Prevention and Early Intervention Division of DFPS and carefully implementing the Family First Prevention Services Act (FFPSA). The legislature took important actions as it relates to the implementation of FFPSA during the regular session, but much more remains to be done in policy and practice to achieve the full promise of what can be achieved through prevention and early intervention.

Our Roundtable will be continuing these conversations through the months ahead and looks forward to reporting out our findings and recommendations in partnership with the provider community. In the meantime, the Legislature can make an important contribution by enacting this funding proposal to help the provider community productively respond to the capacity crisis while efforts to identify and address other root causes of the crisis are pursued.

Thank you for your consideration, your service to the people of Texas and your commitment to the children and families who are truly the foundation of our State's future.

Sincerely,

Knox Kimberly, Chair
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