

# Support MedCARES and Maternal Health Programs in the Department of State Health Services (DSHS) Budget

Testimony to the House Appropriations Committee

## Eliminating funding to prevent and investigate child abuse through MedCARES is deeply concerning.

The Texas Legislature should keep more children safe with their families and, when appropriate, out of foster care. Unfortunately, when families experience significant or prolonged stress, as they have during the pandemic and last week's energy blackout, risk factors for child abuse and neglect or CPS involvement often increase.

MedCARES is an essential tool Texas has to prevent child maltreatment and to evaluate abuse or neglect allegations. Senator Nelson and then-Senator Dan Patrick started the MedCARES program at DSHS in response to the spike in child abuse, neglect, and fatalities during the Great Recession. MedCARES provides grant funding for Sexual Assault Nurse Examiners, child abuse pediatricians, and more.

**By improving child abuse investigations' accuracy, MedCARES protects kids and helps parents mistakenly accused of child abuse.** Research shows that child abuse pediatricians are more likely to correctly rule out abuse or neglect than less specialized physicians looking at the same injuries. Cutting MedCARES funding would tear down critical infrastructure Texas has to protect children.

### Recommendation

- **Fund MedCARES**, which the introduced budget eliminated.

## Support continued funding for DSHS maternal health initiatives.

A child's development and a strong start in life begin with a healthy pregnancy, a healthy birth, and a healthy mother. When medical complications crop up in pregnancy, during labor and delivery, or in the year after pregnancy, it can lead to tragedy for moms, long NICU stays for babies, long-term health issues for moms and babies, and financial costs to the state and health care system.

Through the Texas' Alliance for Innovation in Maternal Health (*TexasAIM*) initiative, DSHS works with hospitals to provide training, facilitate peer-to-peer learning, and implement evidence-based protocols, so hospitals and health professionals have the tools they need to prevent maternal deaths and pregnancy complications. These maternal health and safety practices (often called bundles) — such as Obstetric Hemorrhage Bundle, Severe Hypertension in Pregnancy Bundle, and Opioid Use Bundle — enhance the delivery of health care, save women's lives, and prevent harmful complications for mother and baby.<sup>1</sup>

The COVID-19 pandemic has disrupted critical services, such as regular prenatal check-ups and postpartum care for many Texas women. Hospitals are stretched to their limits helping Texans through the pandemic. Texas hospitals and health providers need the resources to continue providing safe, quality, and effective medical care for mothers and babies.

### Recommendation

- **Support Rider #22 in the DSHS budget**, which continues \$7 million for the TexasAIM initiative; a maternal care coordination services pilot for pregnant women at high risk of complications; and public awareness and prevention activities related to maternal mortality and morbidity.

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<sup>1</sup> More information on *TexasAIM* initiative is available here: <https://www.dshs.texas.gov/mch/TexasAIM.aspx>.