

Last Chance for Texas to Prepare for Foster Care Changes Under New Federal Family First Act

In 2018, President Trump signed the Family First Prevention Services Act (FFPSA) into law. The FFPSA made historic changes to how the federal government finances state child welfare systems by prioritizing prevention and higher-quality foster care services. **The Texas Legislature must take action in two particular areas during the 2021 legislative session to prepare for the law taking effect in Texas on October 1, 2021:**

1. Seize this new opportunity to keep more children safely out of foster care by drawing down additional federal funding for prevention.

The FFPSA offers funding for prevention services to strengthen families and keep them safely together, such as:

- Substance use treatment for parents involved in the CPS system. (DFPS data from 2017 indicate that parental substance use is a contributing factor in 68 percent of removals in Texas.)
- Support for teen parents in foster care. (Youth in Texas foster care are five times more likely than their peers to become pregnant and twice as likely to have their child removed by CPS).

We urge the Legislature to create a broad definition of “candidate for foster care,” or children at risk of entering foster care, to ensure enough families receive this new support to safely stay together.

However, **Texas will *not* receive this federal funding unless the state makes upfront investments in evidence-based practices, the necessary workforce, and comprehensive evaluation of prevention services.**

2. Improve the quality of certain foster care facilities to better support children and to avoid losing federal funding.

The FFPSA seeks to improve the care of children in foster care, especially those with high needs. To meet that goal, once the FFPSA takes effect, the federal government will only reimburse states for placing children with families, in facilities serving special populations (such as trafficking victims or teen parents), or in high-quality facilities. Texas foster care currently relies on Residential Treatment Centers (RTCs) that do not meet these standards.

If Texas does not take action to ensure RTCs meet these higher standards, children with high needs will miss out on the care they deserve and Texas will lose federal funding that we currently receive for foster care.