

Support Texas Infants and Toddlers with Disabilities

Continue Restoring Funding for Early Childhood Intervention (ECI)

Testimony to the House Appropriations Subcommittee on Article II on House Bill 1

Texas ECI Is Highly Effective for Kids With Disabilities

Early Childhood Intervention (ECI) is a federal-state program that contracts with community organizations to provide life-changing therapies and services to babies and toddlers with autism, Down syndrome, and other disabilities and developmental delays. Working with caregivers, ECI helps children learn to walk, communicate with their families, and meet other developmental goals -- reducing the need for costly special education services. Moreover, during the COVID-19 health crisis, ECI has successfully pivoted to providing effective telehealth services, extending a lifeline to Texas' most vulnerable, isolated young kids.

**ECI
Long-Term
Impact**

Reduces need
for special
education

Promotes brain
development in
the critical early
years

More effective
and less costly
than
interventions
later in life

But Funding Cuts Led To Program Closures and Under-Enrollment

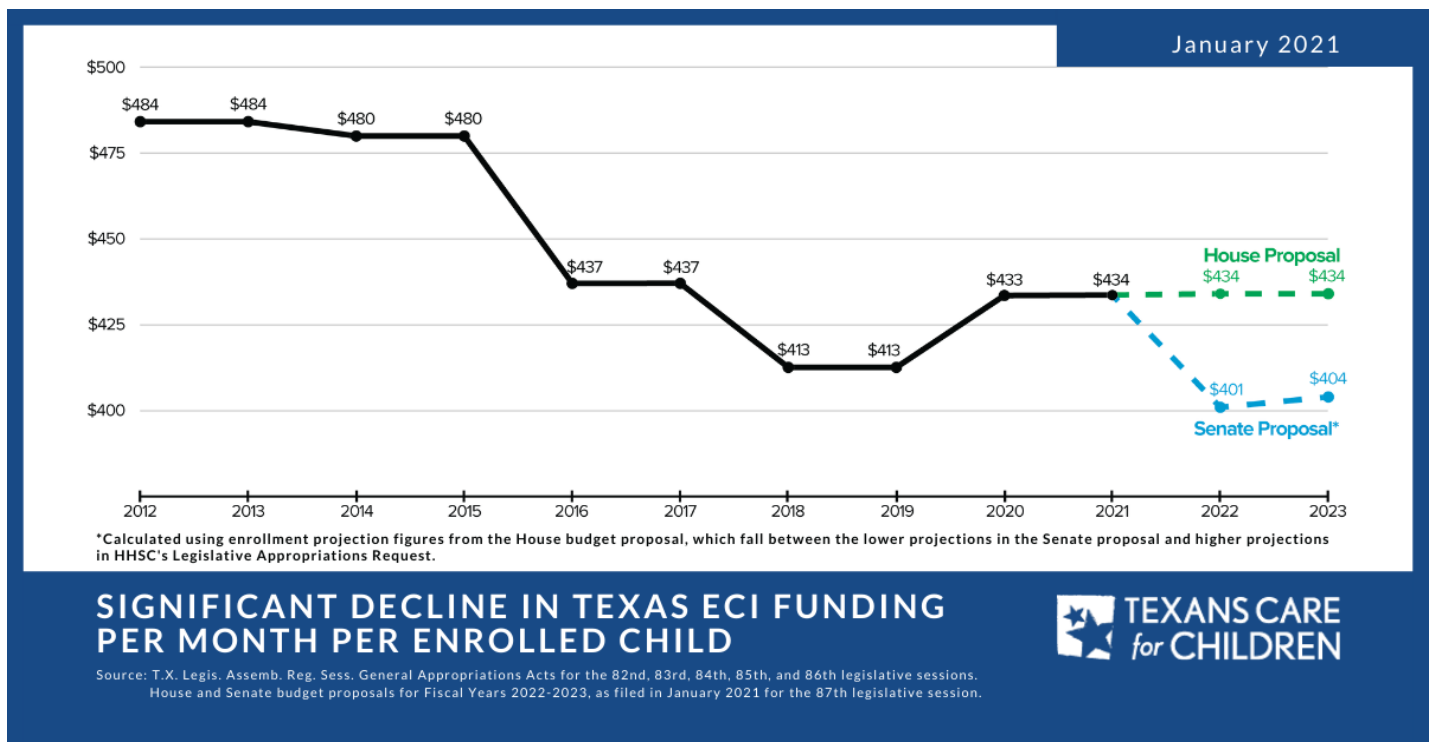
Over the last decade, state leaders cut ECI funding and Medicaid reimbursement rates for therapy providers. Programs have shuttered. Eligible babies and toddlers have gone without support. In response to public outcry, the 2019 Texas Legislature restored some ECI funding, but per child funding levels are still below previous levels.

A Federal Review of Texas ECI Recently Found that Eligible Babies and Toddlers Continue To Go Without Services

In October 2020, the U.S. Department of Education sent a letter to HHSC stating that Texas falls short of its federal obligation to ensure access to ECI services for eligible children. According to federal investigators, Texas fails to adequately fund ECI and must take corrective action to ensure access for all eligible children.^{1,2}

The Legislature Took a Good Step Last Session to Begin Restoring Funding, But HB 1 Fails to Continue Restoring Funding

While we appreciate that the House has provided level funding and provided realistic enrollment projections, we believe the Legislature needs to build upon the good steps taken last session and continue to get ECI funding out of the ditch. As you see in the graph below, SB 1 would only dig the program into a deeper ditch, lowering the per-child monthly funding level from \$434 to barely over \$400 per child, while the House base budget provides level funding, calculated using the more realistic enrollment projection in the House budget bill. We consider the House projection for ECI enrollment to be more realistic because it falls between the higher estimate from HHSC and the lower estimate from SB 1 and because, since 2018, Texas has served more than the number of children projected in the Senate base budget. Even throughout 2020, while dealing with COVID-19, ECI providers served more than 31,000 children, while SB 1 projects only 30,042 children will enroll in FY 2022 and 30,459 children in FY 2023.



Recommendation

Restore ECI Funding to At Least \$176 Million Per Fiscal Year. This recommended level is based on average per-child funding over the last decade (\$450 per child) and the House projected caseload. ECI contractors need additional funding to remain sustainable and have the capacity to serve all eligible children in their communities. The Governor's Committee on People with Disabilities recommended that the Legislature provide sustainable, adequate funding for ECI, which would help address the federal government's concerns about Texas ECI.³

Endnotes

- <https://txchildren.org/posts/2020/11/10/report-tx-eci-funding-amp-enrollment-lagging-for-toddlers-with-disabilities>
- <https://www2.ed.gov/fund/data/report/idea/partcdmsrpts/dms-tx-c-2020-dmsletter.pdf>
- <https://gov.texas.gov/organization/disabilities/gcpd-reports>