

# Support Texas Infants and Toddlers with Disabilities

## Continue Restoring Funding for Early Childhood Intervention (ECI)

March 2021

### Texas ECI Is Highly Effective for Kids With Disabilities

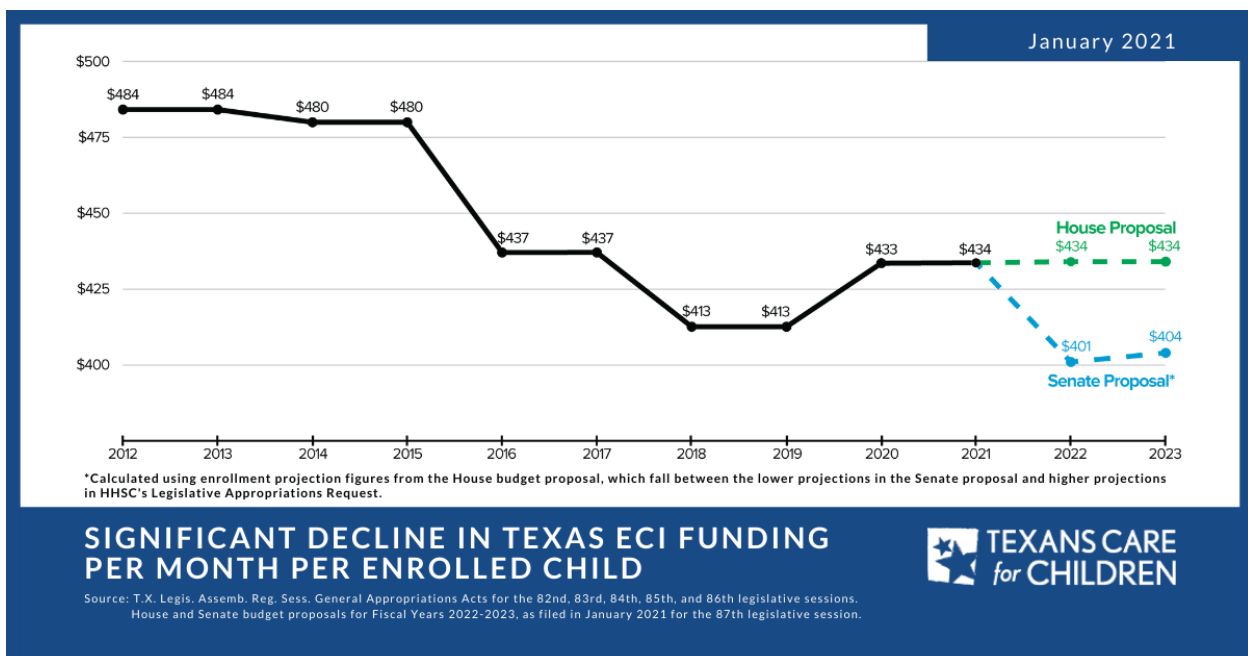
Early Childhood Intervention (ECI) is a federal-state program that contracts with community organizations to provide life-changing therapies and services to babies and toddlers with autism, Down syndrome, and other disabilities and developmental delays. Working with caregivers, ECI helps children learn 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.

### Funding Cuts Led To Program Closures, Under-Enrollment, & Federal Involvement

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

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 the ECI program and must take corrective action to ensure access for all eligible children.**

**As shown on the graph below, the draft budget bills recently revealed by the Texas House and Texas Senate fail to get us further out of the ditch.** (Note that we used the House's projection for ECI enrollment to calculate per-child funding for both the House and Senate budgets in the graph. The House projection was used because it falls between the higher estimate from HHSC and the lower estimate from the Senate.)



## Legislative Action to Strengthen ECI is Imperative -- And Starts with More Funding:

- 1) **Build on progress from last session and restore ECI funding to at least \$450 per child per month, the average funding level over the last decade (\$176 million per fiscal year).** ECI contractors need additional funding to identify, enroll and serve all eligible children in their communities. This is a priority for the Governor's Committee on People with Disabilities.
- 2) **Ensure state-regulated private health insurance plans cover & reimburse ECI therapies and services,** including Specialized Skills Training and Targeted Case Management.
  - [HB 843](#) (Rep. Lopez)/[HB 908](#) (Rep. Julie Johnson)
- 3) **Improve partnerships between child care providers and ECI programs, and create more inclusive child care settings for children with disabilities and delays.** Educate child care providers on how to identify missed developmental milestones and refer families to ECI. This is a priority for the Governor's Committee on People with Disabilities.
  - [HB 168](#) (Rep. Mary Gonzalez)
  - [SB 1140](#) (Sen. Zaffirini) - *similar but not identical bill*
- 4) **Connect young kids to health care by ending error-prone mid-year eligibility reviews in Children's Medicaid.** Establish continuous 12-month coverage for children with Medicaid. This is a priority for the Governor's Committee on People with Disabilities.
  - [HB 290](#) (Rep. Cortez)
  - [SB 39](#) (Sen. Zaffirini)

