

# Support Package of Three Bills to Empower Parents with Children with Complex Needs

## Testimony to the House Subcommittee on Disease Prevention & Women's & Children's Health

In February, Governor Greg Abbott called on the Legislature to give Texas parents more options when they are desperately looking for help for their children with the most complex mental health challenges. He wrote in his budget, that the Legislature should “make additional investments in behavioral health services and supports for children in this state with the most complex needs.”<sup>1</sup>

**The House Subcommittee is considering a package of three bills that answers the call from the Governor.** These bills will help all families with children needing this higher level of treatment.

**By giving parents more options, these bills will also help keep children with their families and out of foster care** — and help them remain stable if they do enter foster care. No child should enter foster care because they can't access mental health care. Yet in FY 2024, 530 children (6% of removals) entered foster care due to unmet mental health needs — not because they were experiencing abuse or neglect by their parents.<sup>2</sup> Another 224 entered care when their parents agreed to share custody of their child with the state to access treatment.<sup>3</sup> Among children without placement, 39% were in care because their families couldn't get the mental health support they needed and neither could foster care system.<sup>4</sup>

**These bills leverage Medicaid to give parents more options, while keeping in place the state's current strict eligibility criteria.** Medicaid currently provides health insurance to one in three Texas children, including all children in foster care. However, it does not cover intensive home and community-based mental health services. As a result, many children with complex needs go without the care they need.

### We urge the Committee to support the following package of bills:

- **HB 2036 by Rep. Tom Oliverson ensures Medicaid covers Intensive Outpatient Programs (IOP) and Partial Hospitalization Programs (PHP)**, which provide structured, short-term treatment for youth who need more than weekly therapy but do not require inpatient care.
- **HB 475 by Rep. Ann Johnson ensures Medicaid covers Multisystemic Therapy (MST)**, an intensive, in-home model that gives parents more tools and consistent support to address serious behavioral challenges in coordination with other systems the family interacts with.
- **HB 488 by Rep. Ann Johnson ensures Medicaid covers Functional Family Therapy (FFT)**, a home-based program that supports parents who feel out of options by helping them strengthen family relationships and guide their child's behavior and mental health.

## Endnotes

1. Office of the Texas Governor. (2025, February). *Proposed state budget for FY 2026–2027*.  
[https://gov.texas.gov/uploads/files/organization/budget-policy/Proposed\\_State\\_Budget\\_for\\_FY\\_2026-2027.pdf](https://gov.texas.gov/uploads/files/organization/budget-policy/Proposed_State_Budget_for_FY_2026-2027.pdf)
2. Department of Family and Protective Services. (FY 2024). Number of Children Removed During Fiscal Year By Age and Removal Reason.  
[https://databook.dfps.texas.gov/views/cps\\_sa\\_19\\_dfps/fyagereasonsummary?%3Adisplay\\_count=n%3Aembed=y%3AisGuestRedirectFromVizportal=y%3Aorigin=viz\\_share\\_link%3AshowAppBanner=false%3AshowVizHome=n](https://databook.dfps.texas.gov/views/cps_sa_19_dfps/fyagereasonsummary?%3Adisplay_count=n%3Aembed=y%3AisGuestRedirectFromVizportal=y%3Aorigin=viz_share_link%3AshowAppBanner=false%3AshowVizHome=n).
3. Department of Family and Protective Services. (FY 2024). *Summary of Children in JMC of DFPS with Prior Conservatorship (CVS)*. [Unpublished data] (on file with author).
4. Texas Department of Family and Protective Services. (2025, April 8). *Children Without Placement (CWOP) agency actions visual – March 2025*.  
[https://www.dfps.texas.gov/Child\\_Protection/State\\_Care/documents/2025\\_03\\_CWOP\\_Agency\\_Actions\\_Visual.pdf](https://www.dfps.texas.gov/Child_Protection/State_Care/documents/2025_03_CWOP_Agency_Actions_Visual.pdf).