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## STRENGTHENING THE VOICES OF CASA STATEWIDE

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### **Texas CASA Public Policy Team Seeks Input on 87<sup>th</sup> Legislature Policy Priorities**

Despite the challenges brought about by COVID-19, the Texas Legislature will convene the 87<sup>th</sup> Legislative Session on January 12, 2021. Legislative advocacy remains a high priority for the CASA network. As we approach the 2021 Legislative Session, the CASA network needs to speak in one united voice to promote legislation that supports the needs of children and families.

Gaining support for additional funding for the CASA programs remains our top priority. In addition, we are proposing an array of important policy issues that we hope to make progress on during the next legislative session.

On the following page, you'll find a current draft of our 87<sup>th</sup> Legislature policy priorities. We want to share these priorities with you and hear about any other issues you think may require legislative action. We need the local CASA programs to help us identify gaps in the child welfare system and to propose solutions about how we can resolve those issues to better support the children and families we work with across the state. We anticipate seeking Texas CASA Board approval on these, and any new legislative priorities, in June.

During the 86<sup>th</sup> Legislative Session, Texas CASA championed numerous child protection bills with the help and support of the CASA network. Major legislation included helping youth obtain a driver's license, an idea originally brought to us by a CASA volunteer. We also successfully advocated for legislation ensuring child and youth voice is weighed when making placement decisions. These are just two examples of the kinds of legislation that Texas CASA fights for alongside the Legislative Advocacy Teams.

As you consider sending us your feedback and legislative ideas, please keep in mind that not every problem necessarily requires a legislative solution. Lawmakers will likely face a record tight budget next session in addition to multiple legislative responses to combat COVID-19 and future public health crises. With this in mind, we encourage you to send us any policy issues that have adversely affected children or families you serve during the COVID-19 pandemic, along with policy solutions for those challenges, if possible.

Please email your legislative ideas to the Public Policy team at [publicpolicy@texascasa.org](mailto:publicpolicy@texascasa.org). Thank you for continuing to share your ideas and feedback with us as we work to improve policies affecting the children and families in your community and across the state.



## Texas CASA Legislative Priorities for 87<sup>th</sup> Legislature

### Texas CASA Funding Items

- Request an increase in annual legislative funding under HHSC by \$\_\_\_\_ million, in addition to the current annual funding level of \$\_\_\_\_ million, to \$\_\_\_\_ million.
- Support continued legislative funding for Family Finding/Collaborative Family Engagement under DFPS at \$643,600 for the 2022-2023 fiscal biennium.

### Texas CASA Legislative Policy Priorities

- Support policies that preserve families, promote family reunification when possible, and minimize the time children spend in foster care.
- Support funding and policy changes to fully implement the federal Family First Prevention Services Act within a reasonable timeframe.
- Support needed state funding for DFPS priorities and adequate foster care and kinship provider rates.
- Integrate policies and practices that respect and elevate child, youth and family voice in all aspects of the child protection system.
- Improve services and supports for older youth in foster care, and youth transitioning out of foster care.
- Support continued state funding to enable the successful expansion of Community-Based Care, and ensure transparency and performance accountability.
- Strengthen policies and services in the STAR Health Medicaid program that cover children and youth currently or formerly in foster care.
- Support necessary changes to the Texas Family Code to ensure children and youth with dual status in foster care and the juvenile justice system receive efficient and effective services and supports.
- Improve access to high-quality treatment services and supports for children, parents and families affected by substance use disorder and mental illness.
- Strengthen policies and programs that improve educational outcomes for children and youth currently or formerly in foster care.
- Support funding and policy changes that help prevent human trafficking and commercial sexual exploitation of children and youth, along with adequate funding for services and supports that meet the needs of survivors of trafficking.
- Expand transportation options for children, parents and family members to help children stay in their school of origin, to support parental and sibling visitation, and to access services.
- Support funding and policy changes that promote the development of a trauma-informed child protection system.
- Support policies to recognize and address disparities and disproportionality in the child protection system and achieve equity for youth and families in vulnerable populations.