

SUPPORTING POLICIES TO KEEP FAMILIES SAFELY TOGETHER

SUMMARY

CASA volunteers across the state advocate to keep families connected and together when safe and possible. Texas CASA has long supported efforts to keep families safely out of the child welfare system and to quickly reunify children with their families if they have to be removed and enter foster care. There are some current challenges in the state of Texas that make the need to focus on strengthening services for children and families even more crucial.

BACKGROUND

When a child is removed from their home, it is extremely traumatic for both the child and their family. The state of Texas should do all it can to provide services, support and resources to children and families to prevent the need for this traumatic intervention.

Expanding Mental Health Services

Although only 5-7% of children enter foster care because of unaddressed mental health challenges, 35% of children without placement entered foster care because they could not access needed mental health services.¹ At the same time, Texas is experiencing a critical shortage of mental health and substance use treatment providers, especially in rural areas.²

In Texas, the majority of child removals are due to neglect, most often involving parental substance use, mental illness or domestic violence³. This fact, coupled with the shortage of mental health and substance use providers, increases the challenges children and families are facing. In many cases, the child welfare system has become the mental health provider of last resort for both children and families. If more resources and interventions became available across communities, many more families could stay safely together and avoid the costly interaction with the child welfare system.

Investing in Family First Prevention Services

The 2018 Federal Family First Prevention Services Act allows prevention services to be provided for up to 12 months for a child and the child's family to address the issue that is putting the child at risk of entering foster care. The prevention services that are eligible for federal reimbursement are mental health services, substance abuse treatment services and in-home parenting skills.⁴ This funding is only available if the state determines that the child can remain safely at home.

If and when the state formally invests in the services funded by the Family First Prevention Services Act, access to mental health and substance abuse services in communities across the state will be

¹ Source: <https://3e78rz4783rc1234r4bkmlml-wpengine.netdna-ssl.com/wp-content/uploads/2021/07/Capacity-Placematsv4-1.pdf>.

² Source: <https://www.tha.org/issues/workforce/#:-:text=More%20than%2080%20percent%20of,professionals%20contribute%20to%20this%20problem>.

³ Source:

https://databook.dfps.state.tx.us/views/cps_sa_10_dfps/fyagereasonsummary?%3AshowAppBanner=false&%3Adisplay_count=n&%3AshowVizHome=n&%3Aorigin=viz_share_link&%3AisGuestRedirectFromVizportal=y&%3Aembed=y.

⁴ Source: https://www.ncsc.org/_data/assets/pdf_file/0019/26614/overview-of-ffpsa-may-18.pdf.

expanded. Both of these services help prevent families from interacting with the child welfare system and would benefit families whose children are removed by the state by increasing the availability of services needed to help them be safely reunified with their children.

POLICY POSITION

Texas CASA supports policies that preserve families, promote family reunification when possible, and minimize the time children spend in foster care.

Current Position:

Texas CASA joins the Child Protection Roundtable in supporting policies and adequate funding to ensure access to prevention and early intervention services to keep families safely together, including fully leveraging federal funds.

Texas CASA supports:

1. Implementing the Family First Prevention Services Act and expanding access and funding for evidence-based mental health, substance abuse treatment and in-home parenting skills.
2. Strengthening the children's mental health service array to prevent entries into foster care because their parents cannot find or access needed mental health care for their children.

If you have questions or concerns related to this or any other Texas CASA legislative priority, please email: publicpolicy@texascasa.org.