

Prevention and Family Preservation

Strengthening Families and Community Bonds

BACKGROUND

Texas relies on community providers to partner with the state and provide upstream prevention and early intervention services, prior to abuse or neglect occurring. The Prevention and Early Intervention (PEI) division at the Department of Family and Protective Services (DFPS) contracts for an array of programs across the state. Families and youth who receive these services through PEI are unknown to the child protective arm of DFPS and PEI keeps records of services outside of the CPS IMPACT system. These voluntary, upstream services are the means toward achieving better outcomes on child safety, resulting in fewer children entering foster care.

DFPS served over 60,000 Texas children, youth, and families by connecting them with voluntary prevention and early intervention services in Fiscal Year 2022. The outcomes of these services demonstrated their effectiveness:

More than 97% of children remained safe from abuse or neglect while engaged in PEI services.

More than 97% of youth engaged in PEI services did

not become involved with the juvenile justice system.

Families served through PEI-supported home visiting programs had better overall health outcomes than the general Texas population, as well as individuals served through comparable programs.

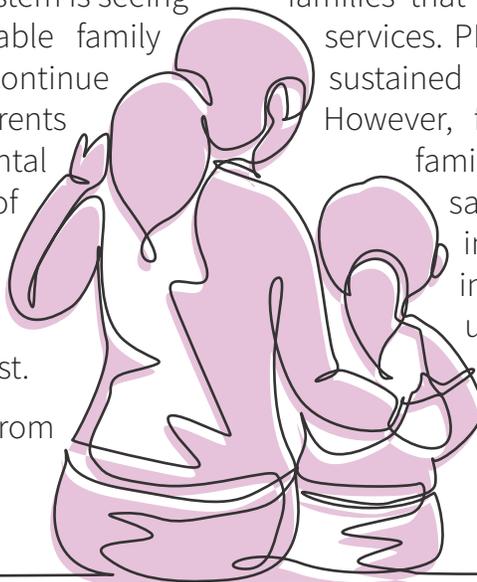
However, prevention is just one strategy for stabilizing and sustaining Texas families. Community providers, along with DFPS Leadership and the Legislature have recognized the critical need for Family Preservation services, that can better equip and heal families who have already experienced abuse and neglect and remain at continued risk. Unlike traditional Family-Based Safety Services, that often provide general oversight and minimal services, the shift to Family Preservation is intended to provide high-quality, evidence-based services to children and their families who need a more intensive level of intervention but can safely remain together without entering the foster care system.

THE IMPACT

Texas families have a need that exceeds available capacity for services. While our system is seeing the affects of a lack of available family preservation services, through continue entries into foster care, more parents refusing to accept parental responsibility or seeking out of home services, the infrastructure and capacity necessary to build and provide high-quality family preservation services does not exist.

Texas families that could benefit from

family preservation services are not the same families that benefit from upstream prevention services. PEI services are critical and must be sustained for families across the state. However, families that would benefit from family preservation services are not the same families that need a more intensive family preservation intervention, so Texas must maintain upstream services and expand capacity for preservation services.



SHIFTING THE POPULATION

Through a variety of legislative and policy changes, Texas has seen a significant drop in removals into the foster care system, but also seen a severe decrease in the number of families being referred to the Family-Based Safety Services stage of service. However, the number of intakes, investigations, and reason to believe findings have remained high. While TACFS agrees that removal from a family and entry into foster care must be a last resort, it's critical to offer services to families that need them in order to truly prevent removal and to equip families with the tools they need to be successful together.

WHAT CAN THE LEGISLATURE DO?

Continue the work of the Community-Based Care (CBC) Court-Ordered Family Preservation Pilots

The pilots established through HB 3041 and DFPS Rider 48 (a) and (b) to provide court-ordered evidence-based services to families who would otherwise experience a removal into the foster care system became operational at the beginning of Fiscal Year 2023. These pilots were established with each of the four operational Single Source Continuum Contractors (SSCCs), who provide CBC in four regions of the state. Since these pilots will have limited time to provide services to families and show outcomes, the Legislature could continue any funding unspent in Rider 48 (a) and (b) through FY 2025. TACFS estimates that \$8.35 million would be available through unspent Family First Transition Act (FFTA) federal funds during the current biennium to continue this work.

Build Capacity for Evidence-Based In-Home Parenting Services Through Community Providers

In coordination with the HB 3041 pilots, Texas could reallocate additional FFTA funding to be granted to community providers around the state. These grant funds could be down-granted through DFPS to TACFS to build infrastructure and capacity for Clearinghouse approved, evidence-based services and to serve families who are voluntarily seeking services. These families would include post-adoption, post-permanency, families who are considering refusing to accept parental responsibility (RAPR), families with children on the waitlist for the RTC project, and DFPS referrals with no open or active investigations or family-based safety services stage. These services would be purposed to be truly voluntary but would still serve families who have demonstrated a risk of future foster care entry. TACFS would estimate that \$15 million would be available through unspent FFTA federal funds from Rider 48 (d) and other FFTA funds designated prior to the 87th for the Qualified Residential Treatment Program (QRTP) pilots.*



No contracts have been signed through the Open Enrollment for the QRTP pilots. However, the Foster Care Rate Modernization process will establish a permanent rate for QRTPs and the Legislature can publish the pro-forma rate in the rate schedule, which would eliminate the need to use FFTA funds to pay for these placements and free up these funds for other priorities.



Research Gaps and Build Capacity for Evidence-Based Substance Use and Behavioral Health Service Needs For Families at Imminent Risk of Entry into the Foster Care System

In partnership with HHSC, DFPS, and Community Providers, Texas should gather data around any gaps in services available to children and families at risk of involvement with our child welfare and understand any unmet needs. Texas should identify improvements to referral processes, avenues to communicate available services, and opportunities for capacity growth. While Texas needs infrastructure and capacity for in-home parenting services, infrastructure already exists at HHSC for Substance Use and Behavioral Health Services. Unfortunately, more capacity must be built to adequately serve children and families at risk of entering the Texas foster care system. The Legislature could reallocate FFTA funds through DFPS to HHSC or community providers to build additional capacity for these services through existing and new contracts. This specific capacity could be held for DFPS referrals for voluntary services for the same populations mentioned as eligible for In-Home parenting services through community providers. TACFS would estimate that \$5 million would be available through unspent FFTA federal funds from Rider 48 (c), Rider 48(e), and other FFTA funds.

Direct DFPS to Submit a Title IV-E Prevention Plan and Begin the Reporting and Reimbursement Processes Required under the Family First Prevention Services Act (FFPSA)

While Texas has more than \$30 million of FFTA funding estimated for reallocation prior to December 2025, the investment of state general revenue funding is required for the state to apply for federal reimbursement as allowed by FFPSA. If Texas were to invest an additional \$2-\$5 million in general revenue, Community Providers could establish capacity for in-home parenting services that the state could include in their Title IV-E Prevention Plan, that must be submitted to and approved by the Administration for Children and Families (ACF) in order to begin the reimbursement and reporting processes. This investment in state funds could inform the resources and processes necessary to ensure Texas' ability to participate in the opportunities afforded by FFPSA.

Ensure Texas has Clear Legislative Direction on the Future of FBSS, FFPSA, Family Preservation, and Community-Based Care

During the 87th, the Texas Legislature provided direction through statutory changes to continue the focus on Family Preservation. However, clarification could be provided to solidify a strong Texas approach.

- Clarify the direction provided in SECTION 31 of SB 1896 (87R) to ensure that DFPS can continue to provide purchased services, including Daycare to families in Family Based Safety Services (FBSS) in addition to evidence-based FFPSA eligible services. Further clarify any statutory direction or funding required to allow DFPS to transition FBSS services to FFPSA eligible services.
- Examine the early results of the HB 3041 pilots where court-ordered families can access evidence-based services and make recommendations to ensure that families at risk can access these services. Consider other oversight approaches beyond court intervention, including performance-based contracts.
- Build on the direction given in SB 1896 that CBC providers assume responsibility for FBSS services as part of their existing contracts and establish a funding methodology and mechanism for this transition to occur as part of the staged approach of CBC, including start-up costs, existing purchased client services, and strategies for shared financial risk.*



Assume SB 1896 intent was for all families referred to FBSS stage of service to be served by SSCCs and have access to evidence-based FFPSA services when necessary and appropriate.

