



THE SENATE OF TEXAS
TEXAS HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

July 10, 2020

Honorable Greg Abbott
Office of the Texas Governor
P.O. Box 12428
Austin, TX 78711

Dear Governor Abbott:

As we continue to grapple with the many devastating effects of the COVID-19 pandemic, thousands of our most vulnerable Texans are at risk of losing the critical services they need. Across the state, child welfare agencies are facing a workforce shortage and worry about the impact this will have on our child protection system.

These organizations must hire essential staff as soon as possible. However, current statute roadblocks, such as fingerprint background checks, are preventing residential childcare facilities from expediting the hiring process, since many of these employment screening services have either reduced their operating hours or closed, due to the pandemic.

Although residential childcare providers and child-placing agencies' hiring managers should continue utilizing online name-based registry checks and the completion of fingerprint background checks, we urge you to temporarily waive the requirements for new-hires to begin working contingent upon receiving fingerprint results. Instead, employees hired under these circumstances should be required to work alongside a tenured staff member until their full-background check has been completed.

In San Antonio, The Children's Shelter was awarded the Bexar County Single Source Continuum Contract from the Texas Department of Family and Protective Services (DFPS) to implement community-based care in Region 8a (Bexar County). We recently spoke with Family Tapestry network providers about issues they are struggling with. In addition to staffing shortages, we learned that they have concerns regarding the following:

- In the event that a residential facility temporarily closes due to an internal outbreak, where will the children go?
- Is there a plan for relief staff to assist if multiple employees test positive and are unable to work, leading to an inability to meet staffing requirements?
- Will the state consider standing up additional tent facilities/hospitals in areas that have been hard hit?
- In addition to the difficulty with fingerprint background checks, accessing requirements such as Tuberculosis testing and CPR training is becoming increasingly difficult. What can be done to assist organizations with maintaining compliance?
- What is the DFPS protocol for when a caseworker tests positive? How is contact tracing taking place for families and organizational staff?
- What is the plan for handling youth who run away and return and were possibly exposed to COVID-19?
- How/where can children be tested quickly? Many organizations are having trouble accessing COVID-19 testing for their youth.
- Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) is still a concern for many agencies. Will the state assist with providing PPE for both staff and youth at child welfare agencies throughout the pandemic?

We hope that you can provide answers to these questions, and we urge you to consider our aforementioned proposal to mitigate the staffing shortage. We encourage our state leaders to use the resources available to safeguard our community, and act now to prevent further hardship to our child protection system. There is no time to waste when it comes to the safety and protection of our children.

Sincerely,



Senator José Menéndez
Senate District 26



Representative Ina Minjarez
House District 124



Senator Donna Campbell
Senate District 25



Senator Peter Flores
Senate District 19



Senator Judith Zaffirini
Senate District 21



Representative Steve Allison
House District 121



Representative Diego Bernal
House District 123



Representative Philip Cortez
House District 117



Representative Roland Gutierrez
House District 119



Representative Lyle Larson
House District 122



Representative Ray Lopez
House District 125



Representative Trey Martinez Fischer
House District 116



Representative Leo Pacheco
House District 118

CC: DFPS Commissioner Jaime Masters