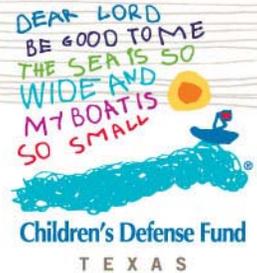


A Message to the 81st Texas Legislature

Dismantle the *Cradle to Prison Pipeline*[®]



There is a growing epidemic that threatens the health and prosperity of all Texans. Because of the *Cradle to Prison Pipeline*[®] crisis, Black boys born in 2001 have a one in three lifetime chance of going to prison, Hispanic boys a one in six chance and White boys a one in seventeen chance of the same fate. From the day tens of thousands of children are born, multiple risk factors converge to suck children into the prison pipeline instead of towards educational advancement and career success. These include: pervasive poverty, inadequate health and mental health care, gaps in early childhood development, disparate educational opportunities, chronic abuse and neglect, rampant substance abuse and overburdened and ineffective juvenile justice systems.

The cost implications of such an epidemic are serious. An ounce of prevention is far more cost-effective than crisis care when children get sick or into trouble, drop out of school or suffer family breakdown.

- The average cost of a mentoring program is \$1,000 a year.
- The annual per child cost of a high quality after-school program is \$2,700.
- The cost of providing a year of employment training for unemployed youths is \$3,448.
- The average annual per child cost of Head Start is \$7,326.
- The cost for a year of public education in Texas is \$7,246 per pupil.
- **The cost of incarcerating a child in the Texas Youth Commission is \$67,890 a year.**

Children do not come in pieces, and our solutions to dismantling the pipeline must be comprehensive. More investment in the early years of an at-risk child's life could provide all taxpayers enormous savings.

It is time for a fundamental paradigm shift that puts the needs of our children at the top of our state's priority list. **We ask the 81st Texas Legislature to put children first and invest taxpayer dollars wisely by taking the following steps:**

- End child poverty
- Ensure access to affordable, comprehensive health coverage for every Texas child
- Ensure access to affordable mental health services for Texas children
- Provide high quality early childhood development programs
- Ensure every child can read at grade level by fourth grade and guarantee quality education through high school graduation
- Protect children from abuse and neglect and connect them to caring permanent families
- Stop the criminalization of children at increasingly younger ages and invest in prevention and early intervention

By dismantling the Pipeline, all Texans will benefit from a strong, self-sustaining workforce, decreased crime rates and lower taxes through a reduction in the prison population and lower rates of recidivism.

We created the Pipeline, and we have the power, knowledge and will to dismantle it.

The following recommendations to dismantle the Pipeline were developed by community, faith and business leaders, educators, juvenile justice and child welfare administrators, attorneys, judges and youth advocates.

End child poverty

The problem: In Texas, almost one in every four children is poor, the majority living in working families, with family incomes of less than \$17,600 a year for a family of three.

Why it matters: Poor children lag behind their peers in many ways beyond income; they are less healthy, trail in emotional and intellectual development and do not perform well in school. The challenges that poor children face accumulate and interact, casting long shadows throughout their lives.

The cost: Child poverty in Texas costs more than \$50 billion in lost productivity, higher crime, and poorer health every year.¹

What must be done: We must end poverty through investments in high quality education for every child, livable wages for families, income supplements like the Earned Income and Child Tax Credits, job training and job creation and work supports like child care and health coverage.

Ensure access to affordable, comprehensive children's health coverage

The problem: Texas has the highest rate of uninsured children in the nation, with one in every five lacking coverage. Nearly 90% of uninsured children live in working families but they cannot afford or do not receive health coverage through their employers.

Why it matters: Children without health coverage who receive care for chronic conditions in local emergency rooms create staggering costs to local taxpayers. In Texas, it costs about \$100 to treat a child's mild asthma attack in a doctor's office, but if a child cannot get early treatment and is hospitalized for a serious asthma attack for three days (the average length of stay), the cost is \$7,300.²

The cost: For less than \$10 a year per Texan, Texas could provide affordable health coverage for 500,000 Texas children through the Children's Health Insurance Program (CHIP) and Medicaid.³ This investment would reduce local property taxes and health insurance premiums and return hundreds of millions of federal tax dollars back to Texas. Texas receives \$2.62 in federal funds for every state dollar invested in CHIP and \$1.53 for every state dollar invested in Medicaid. As a result of cuts to the CHIP program, Texas has returned more than \$900 million in federal matching funds to the U.S. Treasury that have been redirected to other states.

What must be done: Texas must simplify enrollment and recertification to ensure that eligible children get and stay enrolled. One effective mechanism to reach eligible children is to establish 12 months continuous eligibility for children's Medicaid so that children do not have to reapply twice a year to keep their health coverage. Texas must also create a buy-in program for families above the CHIP income limit (\$42,400 a year for a family of four) so that parents can purchase coverage for their children on a sliding scale based on their income.

¹ "The Cost of Child Poverty State by State," Human Services Policy Center, University of Washington, March, 2008.

² Harris County Hospital District

³ Texas Finish Line Campaign

Provide affordable mental health services for Texas children

The problem: There is a chronic lack of access to affordable mental health services for Texas children. Although an estimated 700,000 Texas children have mental illness, the priority population to receive services by the local Mental Health Authorities is 159,118. In Fiscal Year 2008, only 28,445 children received services.⁴

Why it matters: The lack of access to affordable mental health services has serious consequences. While 9% to 13% of the general youth population is estimated to have a mental health disorder, some 50% to 75% of youth in the juvenile justice system have a mental health disorder. Access to mental health treatment would divert many children from involvement in the costly juvenile justice and child welfare systems.⁵

The cost: A systems of care model, with a wrap around planning process that coordinates service delivery from multiple agencies is proven to be effective and cost-effective in improving youth and family outcomes and reducing costs to the state. The Legislative Budget Board estimates a cost savings to the state of as much as \$35.7 million by reducing psychiatric hospitalizations of children, with additional cost-savings to be realized by reducing residential treatment center stays and decreasing involvement with the juvenile justice system.⁶

What must be done: Texas must expand public funding for children's mental health services, with support for a continuity of care from prevention through intervention. Texas must coordinate an interagency strategic plan on children's mental health, with an inter-agency Legislative Appropriations Request on children's mental health, and a focus on removing barriers to local coordination of mental health services and supports. Texas must ensure that all children and youth receive appropriate assessment, diagnoses, and intervention services and improve mental health services for youth in the Juvenile Justice System. Finally, Texas should build on promising local best practices and take them to scale.

Provide high quality early childhood development programs

The problem: Nationally, only 3 percent of eligible infants and young children (0 – 3) are enrolled in Early Head Start and only about half to two-thirds of children eligible for Head Start are enrolled. Quality child care and preschool programs are crucial to level the playing field and ensure every child entering school is ready to learn.

Why it matters: Studies reveal that those enrolled in high quality early childhood programs are subsequently more likely to complete higher levels of education, have higher earnings, be in better health and be in stable relationships, and are less likely to commit a crime or be incarcerated.

The cost: According to the Bush School of Government and Public Service at Texas A&M University, every \$1.00 invested in high quality pre-k yields at least \$3.50 to Texas communities through savings to the public school system as a result of reduced special education and remedial costs; savings to the criminal justice system due to reduced adult crime rates; savings to the child welfare system as result of early intervention and reduced cases of child abuse and neglect; and increased lifetime earnings for mothers.⁷

⁴ Advocacy, Inc.

⁵ Advocacy, Inc.

⁶ Texas Children's Mental Health Forum, 81st Legislative Session Priorities, page 2.

⁷ Texas Early Childhood Education Coalition

What must be done: We must make early childhood development programs accessible to every child by ensuring such programs are affordable, available and of high quality. Texas must support voluntary expansion of pre-k for all currently eligible children from a half day to a full day with a required percentage of partnerships with community based organizations and quality measures, increased reimbursement rates for childcare providers serving low-income children in high quality settings and increased pre-service training hours for child care providers with funding attached.

Ensure every child can read at grade level by fourth grade and guarantee quality education through high school graduation

The problem: Today, 8 out of every 10 Black and Hispanic fourth graders in Texas and 5 out of every 10 Asian and White fourth graders in our public schools cannot read at grade level. Those unable to read well are at high risk of grade repetition and dropping out of school.

Why it matters: Attainment of a high school diploma is the single most effective preventive strategy against adult poverty. Yet the United States has the sixth lowest high school graduation rate among the 30 industrialized market economies.

The cost: A high school dropout earns about \$260,000 less over his or her lifetime than a high school graduate and pays about \$60,000 less in taxes. The United States loses \$192 billion (1.6 percent of its current gross domestic product in combined income and tax-revenue losses) with each group of 18-year-olds who never complete high school.⁸

What must be done: To help each child reach his or her full potential and success in work and life, we need to ensure our schools have adequate resources to provide high quality education to every child. Texas must create district wide social and emotional learning programs that are incorporated into the curriculum and taught by every teacher. We must also change our perceptions of youth and regard all children, no matter what culture, socio-economic class, or visual appearance, as hidden jewels with unlimited potential.

Protect children from abuse and neglect and connect them to caring permanent families

The problem: Some 278,303 children in Texas were reported as alleged abuse and neglect victims in 2007. 71,344 children were confirmed child abuse and neglect victims. 233 Texas children died from abuse and neglect. Every week, 4 children die from child abuse or neglect. Every day, 195 children are confirmed abused. Every hour, 8 children are abused or neglected. Four in ten of the children who are abused or neglected nationally get no help after the initial investigation.⁹

Why it matters: Child abuse and neglect has been identified as a public health crisis by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention and the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. Abused children are at increased risk of serious problems as adults. Stress, trauma and persistent fear at an early age can change the biology of the brain and cause children who do not get appropriate treatment to have lifelong mental, psychological and social problems including poor initiative in school, language and development delays, disproportionate amount of incompetence and failure and inappropriate behavior in peer and adult relationships.¹⁰

⁸ Strong American Schools

⁹ TexProtects, The Texas Association for the Protection of Children

¹⁰ TexProtects, the Texas Association for the Protection of Children

The cost: The annual total direct and indirect costs of child maltreatment are estimated to be nearly \$104 billion. Child abuse costs Texas \$2.35 billion annually (\$34,815 per victimized child multiplied by 67,737 confirmed victims for 2006). **Less than 1% of the Texas Department of Family and Protective Services budget is dedicated to child abuse prevention.**¹¹

What must be done: We must expand cost-effective prevention programs, especially in-home visitation programs, and specialized treatment services for children and their parents. We must connect children to caring permanent families, improve the quality of the child welfare workforce and increase accountability for results for children.

Stop the criminalization of children at increasingly younger ages and invest in prevention and early intervention

The problem: A Black boy born in 2001 has a 1 in 3 chance, a Latino boy a 1 in 6 chance and a White boy a 1 in 17 chance of going to prison in his lifetime. In 2006, almost 14,000 girls were incarcerated, about 1 in every 7 juveniles in residential placement.

Why it matters: The epidemic of incarceration is disrupting communities and eroding our future workforce. Unless we focus our efforts on early intervention and prevention, rather than punishment, we are robbing thousands of youth each year of their futures and our country of vital human resources.

The cost: The cost of incarcerating a child for a year in the Texas Youth Commission is \$67,890, while the cost of a year of public education is \$7,246 per pupil.

What must be done: We must reduce detention and incarceration by increasing investment in prevention and early intervention strategies, such as access to quality early childhood development and education services and access to health and mental health care. In Texas, we must move towards small, regionalized county and state juvenile justice facilities that promote rehabilitation in a non-violent environment. We must improve juvenile justice interventions at the county and state level by using wrap-around services and community-based treatments that have a positive effect on youth before and after system involvement. Finally, we must dismantle the school to prison pipeline and decrease public school practices and zero tolerance policies that funnel students into the juvenile justice system.¹²

¹¹ TexProtects

¹² Texas Juvenile Justice Roundtable, Legislative Priorities for the 81st Legislative Session