



## Testimony to the House State Affairs Committee Opposing HB 7 and HB 20

April 12, 2023

Chairman Hunter, Vice Chairwoman Hernandez, and honorable Members of the House Committee on State Affairs, thank you for the opportunity to testify today. My name is Esther Reyes, and I am the Director of Immigration Policy and Advocacy for the Children's Defense Fund-Texas (CDF-TX). We are a nonprofit children's advocacy organization that believes no child is expendable and that advocates for the right of all children and their families to be safe and healthy.

CDF-TX stands firmly against HB 20 and HB 7, two dangerous, anti-immigrant bills that would waste billions of Texas taxpayer dollars while ignoring the critical challenges facing our state. Together, HB 20 and HB 7 will establish a racist, unconstitutional and unprecedented mandate to criminalize and incarcerate Black and Brown migrants and further militarize border communities who are in fact among the safest in the country.<sup>1</sup>

Already, the House has approved \$4.6 billion for the next biennium on so-called "border security" efforts like Operation Lone Star, a failed operation fueled by white supremacist rhetoric.<sup>2</sup> Choosing fear over facts, state leadership is wasting billions of dollars on deadly and ineffective deterrence policies while ignoring the real problems facing Texas children and families, like teacher shortages, student mental health needs, and the child care crisis.

School districts across Texas are scrambling to hire teachers. A 2022 survey by the Texas State Teacher Association found that seventy percent of teacher-members were "seriously considering leaving the profession."<sup>3</sup> According to the National Center for Educational Statistics, Texas teacher salaries currently rank in the bottom 10 states across the country.<sup>4</sup> For \$4.6 billion, we could increase teacher salaries by \$10,800, an important step in stopping the mass exodus of teachers. Because when teachers leave, children suffer.

Parents in Texas have concerns about their children's mental health, and many are looking to their children's schools for support. According to the U.S. Department of Education, 3 out of every 4 school districts in the southern region, including Texas, report that parents are worried about their children's social, emotional and mental health.<sup>5</sup> State leadership can do more to address this crisis. For the sum of \$4.6 billion, we could provide each school district in Texas \$3.3 million for mental health services and

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<sup>1</sup> Montoya, Luis. 2020. "Reports: Border communities among safest in the country."

<https://riograndeguardian.com/reports-border-communities-among-safest-in-the-country/>

<sup>2</sup> Huddleston, Kathryn et al. 2022. Texas Migrant Arrest Program under "Operation Lone Star"— Continued Urgent Need for Investigation into Race and National Origin Discrimination. Operation Lone Star Title VI Supplemental Complaint.

[https://www.aclutx.org/sites/default/files/operation\\_lone\\_star\\_title\\_vi\\_supplemental\\_complaint.pdf](https://www.aclutx.org/sites/default/files/operation_lone_star_title_vi_supplemental_complaint.pdf)

<sup>3</sup> Texas State Teachers Association. 2022. "TSTA survey indicates a record 70 percent of teachers on the verge of quitting as educator morale sinks; political attacks, pandemic, years of state neglect to blame.

<https://tsta.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/08/080822-Moonlight-survey-results-PR.pdf>

<sup>4</sup> Quillen, Alanna. 2023. "Local Teachers Spend Day 1 of Spring Break Rallying in Austin."

<https://www.nbcdfw.com/news/local/local-teachers-spend-day-1-of-spring-break-rallying-in-austin/3213614/#:~:text=According%20to%20the%20National%20Center.10%20states%20for%20teacher%20pay>

<sup>5</sup> Saxton, Josette. 2022. "Texas Leaders Must Help Parents Seeking Mental Health Support for Their Children." Texans Care for Children.

<https://txchildren.org/posts/2022/6/22/texas-leaders-must-help-parents-seeking-mental-health-support-for-their-children>

meet the ratio of school psychologists to students recommended by the National Association of School Psychologists.<sup>6</sup>

We know that every dollar spent on early childhood education returns \$7 in long-term benefits for children, families, and our society.<sup>7</sup> Yet, our child care system is in crisis with 44% of child care programs likely to close within the next year and many families unable to pay more and early childhood providers unable to earn less.<sup>8</sup>

Keeping our children safe and secure by *actually* investing directly in them – in proven evidence based ways that support their safety – should be simple enough, but children can't vote.

Fundamentally, we need to rethink how Texas leaders approach keeping Texas' children and families safe and secure. But let us call this bill what it is: an overtly racist effort to further criminalize immigrant families and border communities at the expense of tackling the real challenges Texas children and families are facing.

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<sup>6</sup> Ibid.

<sup>7</sup> Meloy, Beth et al. 2019. Untangling the Evidence on Preschool Effectiveness Insights for Policymakers.

[https://edworkingpapers.org/sites/default/files/Untangling\\_Evidence\\_Preschool\\_Effectiveness\\_REPORT.pdf](https://edworkingpapers.org/sites/default/files/Untangling_Evidence_Preschool_Effectiveness_REPORT.pdf)

<sup>8</sup> Ortiz, Patricia. 2023. With funding ending, 44% of child care programs likely to close within the next year, survey says.

<https://www.houstonpublicmedia.org/articles/news/2023/03/17/446390/with-funding-ending-44-of-child-care-programs-likely-to-close-within-the-next-year-survey-says/#:~:text=News-With%20funding%20ending%2C%2044%25%20of%20child%20care%20programs%20likely%20to%20pay%20in%20the%20coming%20months>