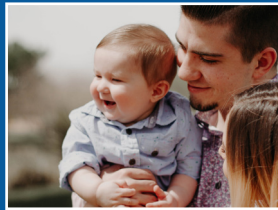




Children's Commission

SUPREME COURT OF TEXAS PERMANENT JUDICIAL
COMMISSION FOR CHILDREN, YOUTH AND FAMILIES



Children's Commission Meeting Notebook February 25, 2022

Supreme Court of Texas
Permanent Judicial Commission for Children, Youth and Families

February 25, 2022

Meeting Notebook
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SUPREME COURT OF TEXAS PERMANENT JUDICIAL
COMMISSION FOR CHILDREN, YOUTH AND FAMILIES

AT&T Hotel and Conference Center
Austin, Texas

February 25, 2022
9:30 a.m. – 2:00 p.m.

Meeting Agenda

- 9:30 Check-In / Networking
- 10:00 Commencement / Opening Remarks
First Order of Business – Adopt Minutes from September 17, 2021
- 10:15 Commissioner Introductions
- 10:45 Children's Commission Staff Updates
Presentation on Dual Status Task Force Report
Jurist in Residence Update
- 11:20 Presentation on Birth Parent and Foster Parent Partnerships
- 12:00 Lunch
- 12:30 Department of Family and Protective Services Update
- 1:00 Office of Court Administration Update
- 1:15 Challenges & Successes Discussion
- 2:00 New Business / Adjourn

Meeting Schedule: May 13, 2022 (virtual)
September 16, 2022 (in person)
November 4, 2022 (virtual)

INSERT - TAB 1

CHILDREN'S COMMISSION MEMBERS

Hon. Debra Lehrmann, <i>Chair</i>	Hon. Rosie Alvarado	Rep. Stephanie Klick	Hon. Randy Shelton
Hon. Rebeca Huddle, <i>Deputy Chair</i>	Karla Baker	Hon. Laura Loera	Luanne Southern
Hon. Eva Guzman, <i>Chair Emeritus</i>	Corey Benbow	Hon. Selina Mireles	Vicki Spriggs
Hon. Harriet O'Neill, <i>Chair Emeritus</i>	Paula Bibbs-Samuels	Katie Olse	Terese Stevenson
Hon. Gary Coley, <i>Vice Chair</i>	Dr. Gary Blau	Hon. Robbie Partida-Kipness	Hon. Thomas Stuckey
	Hon. Susan Brown	Sasha Rasco	Sen. Royce West
	Hon. Darlene Byrne	Hon. Frank Rynd	

Advisors:

Sheila Sturgis Craig,
Equity Advisor
Hon. Michael Massengale,
Senior Judicial Advisor

COMMITTEE MEMBERS

<u>EXECUTIVE</u>	<u>SYSTEMS IMPROVEMENT</u>	<u>LEGAL PRACTICE & PROCESS</u>	<u>TRAINING</u>
Hon. Debra Lehrmann, <i>Chair</i>	Hon. Rob Hofmann, <i>Chair</i>	Hon. Randall Hufstetler, <i>Chair</i>	Hon. Piper McCraw, <i>Chair</i>
Hon. Rebeca Huddle, <i>Deputy Chair</i>	Hon. Rosie Alvarado	Mark Briggs	Hon. Mark Atkinson
Hon. Eva Guzman, <i>Chair Emeritus</i>	Dr. Gary Blau	Sarah Bryant	Tymothy Belseth
Hon. Harriet O'Neill, <i>Chair Emeritus</i>	Hon. Julie Countiss	Hon. Anne Darring	Denise Campbell
Hon. Gary Coley, <i>Vice Chair</i>	Sarah Crockett	Lori Duke	Teal De La Garza
Hon. Rob Hofmann	Sophie Phillips	Hon. Angela Ellis	Barbara Elias-Pereiful
Hon. Randall Hufstetler	Mary Christine Reed	Hon. Delia Gonzales	Hon. Denise Fortenberry
Hon. Piper McCraw	Hon. Robin Sage	Monique Gonzalez	Hon. Richard Garcia
Hon. Susan Brown	Hon. Ian Spechler	Hon. Thomas Stuckey	Hon. Angela Graves-Harrington
		Janet VanderZanden	Hon. Yahara L. Gutierrez
		Charlotte Velasco	Tracy Harting
<i>Staff:</i>	<i>Staff:</i>	<i>Staff:</i>	Ann Palmer
Jamie Bernstein	Jocelyn Fowler	Dylan Moench	Hon. Robbie Partida-Kipness
Tiffany Edwards	Aimee Corbin	Renée Castillo-De La Cruz	Hon. Kellie Price
	Tiffany Edwards	Chelsea Martinez	Hon. Tracey Scown
			Diane Sumoski
			Elizabeth Watkins

DATA

Hon. Susan Brown, *Chair*
Hon. Rosie Alvarado
Ross Baxter
Dr. Monica Faulkner
Hon. Delia Gonzales
Dr. Jangmin Kim
Elizabeth Kromrei
Hon. Robin Sage
Hon. Michael Schneider
Vicki Spriggs
Hon. Carlos Villalon

Staff:

Dylan Moench
Chelsea Martinez

OCA Advisory:
Darrrell Childers
Jeff Cox
Anissa Johnson
Casey Kennedy
Alejandra Peña
Mena Ramon
Charlotte Velasco

Staff:

Milbrey Raney
Renée Castillo-De La Cruz
Andrea Vicencio
Chelsea Martinez

COLLABORATIVE COUNCIL MEMBERS

STAFF

Mikey Betancourt	Knox Kimberly	Mary Christine Reed	Jamie Bernstein, Executive Director
Andrew Brown	Brian Klas	Tanya Rollins	Milbrey Raney, Assistant Director
Irene Clements	Norman Ladd	Danielle Schaefer	Jessica Arguijo, Communications Manager
Sarah Crockett	Dr. Tracy Levins	Johana Scot	Renée Castillo-De La Cruz, Staff Attorney
Teal De La Garza	Stephanie Madrigal	Andrea Sparks	Aimee Corbin, Staff Attorney
De Shaun Ealoms	Gabriella McDonald	Theresa Thomas	Tiffany Edwards, Executive Assistant
Barbara Elias-Perciful	Dr. Jill McLeigh	Kenneth Thompson	Jocelyn Fowler, Staff Attorney
Mike Foster	Kate Murphy	Ruth Thornton	Monica Mahoney, Program Specialist
Will Francis	Judy Powell		Chelsea Martinez, Executive Assistant
			Dylan Moench, Legal Representation Director
			Patrick Passmore, Finance Manager
			Willette Sedwick, Accountant
			Andrea Vicencio, Program Specialist
			Hon. Rob Hofmann, Senior Jurist in Residence
			Hon. Piper McCraw, Jurist in Residence

INSERT - TAB 2

Supreme Court of Texas Permanent Judicial Commission for Children, Youth and Families

September 17, 2021
9:30 a.m. – 12:30 p.m.
Zoom Meeting

Meeting Minutes

ATTENDANCE

Commissioners	Attended	Did Not Attend
Chair, Hon. Debra Lehrmann, Justice, Supreme Court of Texas, Austin	✓	
Deputy Chair, Hon. Rebeca Huddle, Justice, Supreme Court of Texas, Austin	✓	
Past Chair, Hon. Eva Guzman (ret.), Houston		✓
Vice Chair, Hon. Gary Coley, Judge, 74 th District Court, Waco	✓	
Hon. Rosie Alvarado, Judge, 438 th District Court, San Antonio	✓	
Col. Sonya Batchelor, General Counsel, Texas Military Department, Austin		✓
Corey Benbow, Chief Executive Officer, The Tax Box, Austin	✓	
Paula Bibbs-Samuels, Parent Representative, Slaton	✓	
Dr. Gary Blau, Executive Director, Hackett Center, Houston	✓	
Hon. Susan Brown, Presiding Judge, 11 th Administrative Judicial Region, Houston		✓
Hon. Darlene Byrne, Chief Justice, Third Court of Appeals, Austin	✓	
Hon. Julie Countiss, Justice, First Court of Appeals, Houston	✓	
Deneen Dryden, Associate Commissioner for Child Protective Services, Department of Family and Protective Services, Austin	✓	
Elizabeth Farley, Budget & Policy Advisor, Office of the Governor, Austin		✓
Hon. Roy Ferguson, Judge, 394 th District Court, Alpine	✓	
Anne Heiligenstein, Texas Strategic Consultant, Casey Family Programs, Austin	✓	
Hon. Randall Hufstetler, Judge, 300 th District Court, Angleton		✓
Hon. Stephanie Klick, Texas House of Representatives, District 91, North Richland Hills	✓	
Hon. Selina Mireles, Associate Judge, 4 th and 5 th Administrative Judicial Regions Child Protection Court, Laredo		✓
Katie Olse, Executive Director, Texas Alliance of Child and Family Services, Austin	✓	
Hon. Robbie Partida-Kipness, Justice, Fifth District Court of Appeals, Dallas	✓	
Hon. Frank Rynd (ret.), General Counsel, Archdiocese of Galveston-Houston, Houston	✓	
Hon. Michael Schneider (ret.), Partner, Berg, Plummer, Johnson & Raval, LLP, Houston	✓	
Hon. Randy Shelton, Judge, 279 th Civil District Court, Beaumont	✓	
Luanne Southern, Executive Director, Texas Child Mental Health Care Consortium, Austin	✓	
Vicki Spriggs, Chief Executive Officer, Texas CASA, Austin	✓	
Terese Stevenson, Vice President, Grants, The Rees-Jones Foundation, Dallas	✓	
Hon. Royce West, Texas Senate, District 23, Dallas		✓
Equity Advisor		
Sheila Craig, Director, Substance Use Disorder Services, Policy, Prevention, and Planning, Health and Human Services Commission, Austin	✓	
Senior Judicial Advisor		
Hon. Michael Massengale (ret.), Mediator and Arbitrator, Houston	✓	

Attending Collaborative Council Members

Andrew Brown, Distinguished Senior Fellow of Child and Family Policy, Texas Public Policy Foundation, Austin
Sarah Crockett, Director of Public Policy, Texas CASA, Austin
De Shaun Ealoms, Parent Program Specialist, Department of Family and Protective Services, Austin
Fedora Galasso, Executive Director, Texas Network of Youth Services, Austin
Barbra Grimmer, Child Welfare Policy Coordinator, Texas Council on Family Violence, Austin
Sandra Hachem, Senior Assistant County Attorney, Harris County Attorney's Office, Houston
Lisa Harst, Strategic Partnerships Associate, Children's Advocacy Centers of Texas (CACTX), Austin
Julia Hatcher, Attorney and President, Texas Association of Family Defense Attorneys, Galveston
Kerrie Judice, CPS Research and Policy Analyst, TexProtects, Austin
Knox Kimberly, Senior Vice President – Advocacy and Stakeholder Relations, Upbring, Austin
Stephanie Madrigal, Safe Babies Director, First3Years, Dallas
Gabriella McDonald, Pro Bono & New Projects Director, Texas Appleseed, Austin
Dr. Jill McLeigh, Director of Research, Policy, and Advocacy, Children's Health, Dallas
Mary Christine Reed, Director, Texas Foster Youth Justice Project, Texas RioGrande Legal Aid, Austin
Tanya Rollins, Child Welfare Professional, Austin
Danielle Schaefer, Guardian ad Litem, Harris County Child Advocates, Houston
Johana Scot, Executive Director, Parent Guidance Center, Austin

Attending Committee Members and Guests

Hon. Mark Atkinson, Executive Director, Texas Center for the Judiciary, Austin
Sarah Bryant, Managing Attorney, Texas Legal Services Center Family Helpline, Austin
Teal De La Garza, Attorney at Law, Bill De La Garza & Associates, P.C., Houston
Barbara Elias-Perciful, President, Texas Lawyers for Children, Dallas
Hon. Delia Gonzales, Judge, Dallas County Child Protection & Permanency Court, Dallas
Hon. Angela Graves-Harrington, Judge, 246th Family District Court, Houston
Hon. Yahara Gutierrez, Judge, 65th District Court, El Paso
Dr. Jangmin Kim, Assistant Professor, Texas State University, San Marcos
Ann Palmer, Legislative Advocacy Coordinator, Texas CASA, Austin
Wanda Peña, Senior Director, Casey Family Programs, San Antonio
Kellie Price, Appellate Attorney, Department of Family and Protective Services, Austin
Hon. Robin Sage, Judge (ret.), Judicial Engagement Team, Casey Family Programs, Longview
Diane Sumoski, Director, Child Advocacy Clinic at SMU, Dallas
Hon. Carlos Villalon, Judge, Child Protection Court of the Rio Grande Valley West, Edinburg
Elizabeth Watkins, Family Justice Director, Williamson County Attorney's Office, Georgetown

Office of Court Administration

Mena Ramon, General Counsel
Anissa Johnson, Specialty and Children's Courts Program Manager

Attending Staff

Jamie Bernstein, Executive Director
Milbrey Raney, Assistant Director
Jessica Arguijo, Communications Manager
Renée Castillo-De La Cruz, Staff Attorney
Aimee Corbin, Staff Attorney
Tiffany Edwards, Executive Assistant
Jocelyn Fowler, Staff Attorney
Monica Mahoney, Program Specialist
Chelsea Martinez, Executive Assistant
Dylan Moench, Legal Representation Director
Patrick Passmore, Finance Manager
Andrea Vicencio, Program Specialist

Hon. Rob Hofmann, Judge, 452nd District Court, Senior Jurist in Residence, Mason
Hon. Piper McCraw, Judge, 469th District Court, Jurist in Residence, McKinney

CALL TO ORDER AND OPENING REMARKS

Justice Debra Lehrmann called the meeting to order at 9:30 a.m. and expressed her enthusiasm about the opportunity to serve as the Chair of the Children's Commission. Justice Lehrmann thanked everyone involved with the Children's Commission for their dedication and hard work for the betterment of children's lives. She then expressed her gratitude to her predecessors, Justice Harriet O'Neill, Chief Justice Wallace Jefferson, and Justice Eva Guzman for their roles in establishing and leading the Children's Commission. Lastly, Justice Lehrmann shared her appreciation for Justice Rebeca Huddle and announced that Justice Huddle was appointed to serve as the new Deputy Chair of the Children's Commission.

Justice Huddle shared her gratitude for the opportunity to serve as Deputy Chair of the Children's Commission as well as her appreciation for her predecessors. She noted that although she looks forward to meeting in person, the virtual meeting provides an option to connect and convene in a virtual space. Justice Huddle also expressed her enthusiasm to serve alongside Justice Lehrmann.

Justice Lehrmann concluded opening remarks by underscoring the importance of exploring the impact of COVID-19 on children and families in the child welfare system.

Commissioner, Committee, and Collaborative Council Membership Changes

Justice Lehrmann announced that Judge Michael Schneider's term as Commissioner is ending and that this was his last meeting as a Commissioner. She thanked him for his hard work for the betterment of the lives of children and families in Texas, including his work as Data Committee Chair.

Justice Lehrmann reported that Colonel Sonya Batchelor would also leave the Children's Commission and she expressed her gratitude for Col. Batchelor's contributions and for providing a military perspective to the work of the Children's Commission.

Justice Lehrmann then announced the following committee member changes. Independent consultant Carolyne Rodriguez will leave the Systems Improvement Committee and Sophie Phillips of TexProtects will join the committee. Anna Ford retired from DFPS and Crystal Leff-Piñon formerly of the Family Helpline accepted a new position and both will no longer serve on the Legal Practice and Process Committee. Sarah Bryant, the new Managing Attorney of the Family Helpline at the Texas Legal Services Center, joins the Legal Practice and Process Committee. Cathy Cockerham retired from Texas CASA, Debra Emerson retired from DFPS, and Fairy Davenport Rutland formerly of HHSC will all leave the Training Committee. Judge Denise Fortenberry, Judge Yahara Gutierrez, Ann Palmer of Texas CASA, Justice Robbie Partida-Kipness, Kellie Price with DFPS, Judge Tracey Scown, and Diane Sumoski with the Child Advocacy Clinic at SMU will all join the Training Committee. Judge Michael Schneider will no longer serve as the Chair of the Data Committee but will continue to serve as a member. Jeff Cox is no longer at the Texas Alliance of Child and Family Services and will not serve on the Data Committee in that capacity. Presiding Judge Susan Brown is the new Data Committee Chair. Justice Lehrmann thanked each departing committee member for their lasting contributions and welcomed the new members.

Justice Lehrmann announced the departing Collaborative Council members who are as follows: Tymothy Belseth with the Texas Institute for Child and Family Wellbeing; Lynn Chamberlin with the Harris County Attorney's Office; attorney Bill Connolly of Houston; David Halpern with Texas A&M Systems; Lisa Harst with CACTX; attorney Alex Hunt of Houston; independent consultantCarolyn Rodriguez of Austin; Janet Sharkis with Community Shares of Texas; Judge Ian Spechler; and Jeanne Stamp with UT's Charles A. Dana Center. Justice Lehrmann also shared the new Collaborative Council members who are as follows: Andrew Brown, Distinguished Senior Fellow of Child and Family Policy at the Texas Public Policy Foundation; Julia Hatcher, the President of the Texas Association of Family Defense Attorneys; Danielle Schaefer, Court Appointed Special Advocate in the Houston area; and Barbra Grimmer, the new representative from the Texas Council on Family Violence. Justice Lehrmann closed by thanking the outgoing members and welcoming the new members.

Adoption of May 14, 2021, Meeting Minutes

Justice Lehrmann directed members to the May 14, 2021, Commission Meeting Minutes behind Tab 2 (page 13) of the Meeting Notebook that were distributed prior to the meeting.

ACTION: Justice Lehrmann asked for a motion to adopt the Minutes. Chief Justice Darlene Byrne made a motion, which was seconded by Ms. Vicki Spriggs. Hearing no objections, Commissioners voted to adopt the Minutes for the May 14, 2021, Children's Commission meeting.

EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR REPORT & PROJECT UPDATES

Ms. Bernstein directed Commissioners to review the Commission Report behind Tab 3 (page 25) in the Notebook. Ms. Bernstein noted that the five-year Strategic Plan was developed with guidance from the Strategic Planning Committee. She reported that the Strategic Plan captures the five goals of the Children's Commission: Collaboration, Systems Improvement, Legal Practice and Process, Training, and Data. Ms. Bernstein and the Children's Commission staff then highlighted strategies and projects for each of the five goals for the coming fiscal year, all of which are tied to the desired outcome.

Mr. Passmore directed the Commissioners to the Financial Report located behind Tab 4 (page 57) in the Notebook and he reported on the proposed FY2022 budget.

ACTION: Justice Lehrmann asked for a motion to approve the projects and the associated expenditures. Chief Justice Darlene Byrne made a motion, which was seconded by Judge Frank Rynd. Hearing no objections, Commissioners voted to adopt the motion.

TEXAS DEPARTMENT OF FAMILY & PROTECTIVE SERVICES (DFPS) UPDATE

Ms. Deneen Dryden announced that the Department received 25.3 million dollars in Chafee Funds to support youth and young adults transitioning out of foster care. The funds are used for computers for secondary and post-secondary schools, car repairs, transportation issues, transitional living allowance, and emergency rent and utility payments to combat homelessness. Ms. Dryden reported that in September 2021 DFPS awarded Kinship Navigator Grants which provide financial assistance to complete kinship caregivers' licensing or adoption verification. She

also noted that Sasha Rasco's position in the Prevention and Early Intervention Division is now the Chief Prevention and Community Well-Being Officer.

Ms. Dryden announced that Teresa Thomas is the new Director of the Office of Community Based Care Transition, and that Region 1 has started moving into Stage II which will be live in March 2022. She also reported that Region 8b will go live with Stage I in October 2022.

Ms. Dryden shared that Robert "Rich" Richmond is the new Child Protective Investigations (CPI) Associate Commissioner and that the new CPI Deputy Associate Commissioner will be Tommy Ward.

Ms. Dryden then reported that DFPS received 32.9 million dollars in general revenue funding through Rider 51 in the General Appropriations Act from the Legislature during the recent legislative session. This funding was provided for the 2022-23 biennium to build capacity in Community Based Care regions by providing temporary rate increases, awarding incentive payments to providers showing improvement on performance outcomes, and will be distributed in the form of grants to providers. DFPS also received an additional 90 million dollars in general revenue in the biennium through House Bill 5. Ms. Dryden shared that of those funds, 70 million dollars were allocated for providing supplemental payments to retain current providers and to increase provider capacity. The remaining 20 million dollars will be used to target foster care capacity grants across the state to address the existing foster care capacity shortage.

Ms. Dryden announced that DFPS is working on updating policies and updating various IT projects that are needed to accommodate implementation of bills from the 87th Legislative Session. Ms. Dryden then shared updates on a few projects which address Senate Bill 1896 that support the Department's efforts to serve specialized youth populations and increase placement capacity. Ms. Dryden reported that DFPS was charged to provide an opportunity through special provision of the General Appropriations Act, to look at and define the Foster Care Service Continuum, also known as the Foster Care Rate Modernization. Ms. Dryden shared that the Foster Care Rate Modernization work is in progress and that a report will be released in January 2022.

Ms. Dryden concluded by announcing that DFPS successfully achieved compliance with the Federal Performance Improvement Plan required by the Child and Family Services Review.

OFFICE OF COURT ADMINISTRATION (OCA) UPDATE

Ms. Mena Ramon announced that former Administrative Director David Slayton left OCA on August 31, 2021, and that OCA is hoping to have a new director by the end of 2021. Ms. Ramon also gave an update on the two pilot courts that have been selected for the hybrid hearing project: Dallas County Child Protection & Permanency Court, presided over by Judge Delia Gonzales, and the Second Region Child Protection Court #2, presided over by Judge Andrea James. Ms. Ramon shared that the equipment for the hybrid project was ordered and will be installed after it is received.

Ms. Ramon reported that OCA selected three vendors to support case management: Tyler Technology, I Doc ID, and Icon.

Ms. Ramon announced that for the upcoming special session, OCA requested additional funding for the backlog of cases in the Texas courts due to COVID-19 to help ease the strain on judges, visiting judges, court reporters, and court coordinators. Finally, Ms. Ramon addressed Senate Bill 6 which passed during the second special legislative session and addresses bail reform. She noted that OCA will provide information for judges and magistrates to help them determine bail.

JURIST IN RESIDENCE REPORT

Hon. Rob Hofmann of Mason County shared that he worked with the Commission and other partners on emergency orders, the capacity crisis, prevention strategies, reasonable efforts training, Community Based Care, equity issues, trauma, human trafficking, and most recently the Remote Hearings Proceedings Task Force. Judge Hofmann announced that he presented at the Bureau of Justice Assistance's Rural Response to the Opioid Epidemic Webinar; NCJFCJ's Enhanced Guidelines Training; Oklahoma Judicial Conference; the Dallas Bar Association; and at the Children's Commission Child Protection Court Convening.

Hon. Piper McCraw of Collin County reported that she worked with Judge Hofmann and the Children's Commission staff to address new legislation that will result in sweeping changes to child welfare law. Judge McCraw expressed her excitement over the success of the recent virtual Trial Skills Training held in early September and thanked Children's Commission staff for their dedication.

COMMISSION MEMBER UPDATES

Hon. Darlene Byrne from Austin announced that she had the privilege of swearing in a new class of CASA volunteers and expressed her gratitude for the volunteers who want to support children and families. Chief Justice Byrne shared that the Third Court of Appeals held oral argument in person on September 16 in Bell County which marked an important milestone in light of closures due to COVID-19.

Chief Justice Byrne announced that she is a new Board Member with TexProtects and the Texas Center for the Judiciary. Chief Justice Byrne expressed her excitement that through the Statewide Collaborative on Trauma Informed Care, she, Katy Bourgeois and Cindy Patrick were asked to present at the Philanthropic Southwest 73rd Annual Conference about trauma informed care in October. Chief Justice Byrne shared that she is also working with Judge Peter Sakai on developing a one-hour trauma informed care module for attorneys who represent children and CASAs in Bexar County. Chief Justice Byrne and Judge Hofmann plan to replicate that training for the Hill Country Ad Litem Seminar in February 2022.

Hon. Gary Coley from Waco announced that he participated in an event in McLennan County, and also presented a documentary in other surrounding areas, to create community awareness about the issue of human trafficking, including the impact on boys. Judge Coley expressed his excitement about an offer received in Waco of a donated residence which will be renovated to house youth who experience trafficking. The plan is for this new placement option to open during calendar year 2022.

Judge Coley shared information about a local effort to identify volunteers who are certified mediators to mediate in CPS cases. The local Dispute Resolution Center planned a training on October 6-8, 2021, on Zoom for this purpose. Those interested in the training are encouraged to reach out to Judge Coley.

Hon. Rosie Alvarado from San Antonio expressed her gratitude to all the staff on the Children's Commission, especially Ms. Raney for her help with preparing for the upcoming Child Welfare Judges Conference. Judge Alvarado shared that Judge Peter Sakai announced his resignation from the 225th District Court in Bexar County. Judge Alvarado added that the PEARLS court program just launched its fifth year, and the EAGLES court celebrated its second year. Judge Alvarado expressed her excitement to announce the first PEARLS court alumnae college graduation. Lastly, Judge Alvarado noted that she plans for the PEARLS court to serve as a mentor court to other jurisdictions.

Mr. Corey Benbow from Austin expressed his gratitude for continuing to serve on the Children's Commission and reported that he had no additional updates to share.

Ms. Paula Bibbs-Samuels from Slaton shared that she helped plan and create different topics for the Prevent Child Abuse America Conference, presented at the Prevention Mindset Institute, and she will be a keynote speaker at the upcoming Child Welfare Judges Conference. Since ending her time as a parent fellow, she accepted an invitation to create video footage for birth parents and foster parents for the Children's Bureau Learning and Coordination Center.

Ms. Bibbs-Samuels reported that parents around Texas in the Parent Collaboration Group continue to have monthly meetings in their regions. Several parents attended the Birth and Foster Parent Partnership (BFPP) Virtual Convening where Ms. Bibbs-Samuels had a brief presentation on the BFPP Tool Kit. Ms. Bibbs-Samuels added that she would share the Tool Kit with those who are interested.

Dr. Gary Blau from Houston announced that David Auzenne will serve as the new Vice President of Health Equity at the Hackett Center. Dr. Blau shared that the Hackett Center recently helped the Boys and Girls Club of Houston develop a strategic approach to addressing youth resilience and the continued challenges and aftermath of COVID-19. Dr. Blau also noted that the Hackett Center created a one-page brochure that highlights the mission, vision, and work of the organization.

Dr. Blau announced that the Meadows Mental Health Policy Institute Engage and Excel Conference was scheduled for September 30 and October 1, 2021. Dr. Blau concluded by sharing that he recently co-authored an article titled *The Evolution of the System of Care Approach*.

Hon. Roy Ferguson from Alpine expressed his gratitude to Texas CASA for stepping in and coming to West Texas to support his community's response to COVID-19-related challenges. He also expressed appreciation to Ms. Ramon, Mr. Slayton, and OCA for the uniform case management system.

Judge Ferguson shared that the extensions granted by the Texas Supreme Court's Emergency Orders allowed for more mediation in many cases and that these mediations had a large impact

on many cases. Lastly, he encouraged the use of mediation after seeing the positive impact it had in his court.

Anne Heiligenstein from Austin shared that Casey Family Programs has several initiatives related to race equity and parent collaboration, in partnership with Ms. Bibbs-Samuels, PEI, CPS, and the Children's Commission. This includes a multi-state race equity collaborative. Ms. Heiligenstein noted that she is also working with Ms. Katie Olse at the Alliance and DFPS to strengthen the availability of Family Resource Centers. Casey Family Programs also partnered with the Alliance to assist with gathering information from providers and inform the Rate Modernization Study mentioned by Ms. Dryden.

Hon. Robin Sage from Longview announced that Casey Family Programs is in the process of implementing a multidisciplinary legal representation pilot in McLennan County with the assistance of Judge Gary Coley, DFPS, and Commission staff that will include pre-petition representation for families. The two-year project is expected to start in November 2021.

Rep. Stephanie Klick from North Richland Hills announced that the legislature included supplemental funding for placements during the second special session and she expressed her interest in seeing the impact of these funds. She also announced that the third special legislative session was set to begin on Monday, September 20, 2021.

Ms. Katie Olse from Austin shared that the Texas Alliance of Child and Family Services is honored to help support DFPS and older youth with the distribution of Chafee funds. Ms. Olse reported that the Alliance is hard at work training providers across the state. Ms. Olse also announced that the Alliance annual conference was scheduled for November 2021.

Hon. Robbie Partida-Kipness from Dallas expressed her gratitude for serving on the Training Committee and to Judge McCraw for the invitation to serve.

Hon. Frank Rynd from Houston shared that he is on the Board of the CASA affiliate Houston Child Advocates and reported that they still receive donations and have over 100 volunteers; however, there is a bit of concern over a drop in assigned cases.

Hon. Michael Schneider from Houston expressed his gratitude for the honor of serving on the Children's Commission for the last six years.

Hon. Randy Shelton from Beaumont announced that his court is working on implementing a program to help engage social workers with families. He hoped to connect students from Lamar University to families to help meet their basic needs, like housing, transportation, or cell phones.

Ms. Luanne Southern from Austin provided an update on the Child Psychiatry Access Network and the Texas Child Health Access through Telemedicine Initiative. The Child Psychiatry Access Network provides child psychiatry consultations for primary care physicians, as well as training to individuals and doctors on specific topics (i.e., trauma).

Ms. Vicki Spriggs from Austin announced that Andy Homer planned to retire in mid-October, and that CASA will hire for a General Counsel position. Ms. Spriggs also shared that Cathy

Cockerham, the Liaison for Program Development, planned to retire. Ms. Spriggs reported that Ms. Sarah Crockett transitioned into a new position and is now the Director of Public Policy.

Ms. Spriggs shared that Texas CASA was very involved with the issue of children who are in unlicensed placements, working with local programs and supporting CPS staff. Ms. Spriggs announced that the Dallas CASA program purchased YMCA memberships for children who were in those facilities.

Ms. Terese Stevenson from Dallas shared that the funding community is currently focused on helping non-profit agencies who continue to struggle operationally with the impact of COVID-19. Ms. Stevenson expressed her excitement about providers cultivating new ideas to help build family resiliency and address concerns of children in care. Ms. Stevenson reported that funders are currently working on ways to help address the capacity crisis and how they can cultivate higher levels of therapeutic placement to help children with special needs. Ms. Stevenson also announced that the Statewide Child Welfare Funders Group will gather soon.

Ms. Sheila Craig from Austin gave an update on the Equity Workgroup, which met on June 24, 2021. The workgroup provided feedback to the Commission on the Texas Child Protection Law Bench Book chapter on disproportionality and equity and discussed possible future projects. The Equity Workgroup is scheduled to meet again on September 30, 2021. Ms. Craig shared that Judge Aurora Martinez Jones of Austin gave a presentation on equity at the Cultivating Wellness Through Resilience and Equitable Practices Institute that took place on August 17-19, 2021 and that it was very well-received. Ms. Craig announced that she will now oversee the Texas Targeted Opioid Response Program as of September 1, 2021. Lastly, Ms. Craig shared that her department has an open position for the Director for Prevention and Behavioral Health.

Hon. Julie Countiss from Houston announced that the Houston Bar Association is hosting a Family and Probate Bench Bar Conference on October 28, 2021, at Houston's Hotel Zaza.

COLLABORATIVE COUNCIL MEMBER UPDATES

Ms. Mary Christine Reed with the Texas Foster Youth Justice Project gave an update on the additional Chaffee funding and efforts to educate and distribute information about these funds. Ms. Reed shared that 9 million dollars of the funding was distributed as "Pan Aid," allocated to DFPS, and that DFPS was given a very short timeline by Congress to disburse these funds. DFPS contracted with the Texas Alliance of Child and Family Services to distribute these funds to support current and former older foster youth up to the age of 27 who were impacted by COVID-19. Ms. Reed noted that the Texas Foster Youth Justice Project could assist any qualified youth with accessing these funds. Ms. Reed provided several examples of how the funding positively impacted several of her current and former clients. Ms. Reed provided more information about the funding and the application process in the Notebook.

Ms. Barbara Elias-Perciful with Texas Lawyers for Children shared that in 2019 her organization created a sixteen-hour Legal Professional Trauma Training Program and she stated that this program meets the requirements listed in the Senate Bill 904 (87th Regular Legislative Session). She added that the training will be converted into a digital format that can be accessible to both judges and attorneys online. Ms. Elias-Perciful reported that Texas Lawyers for Children

has an “Ask an Expert” series with Dr. Martin Irwin on *Understanding the Overuse of Psychotropic Medicine in Foster Care Children* that will be available in early October 2021. Ms. Elias-Perciful concluded by sharing that she is a part of the State Bar’s Child Protection Law Section leadership, and they are working on several presentations regarding the impact of trauma on children.

NEW BUSINESS

Justice Lehrmann announced that the locations and dates for the Children’s Commission meetings in 2022 will be announced via email when they become available.

ADJOURNMENT

The meeting was adjourned at 12:28 p.m.

INSERT - TAB 3

REPORT TO THE COMMISSION

February 25, 2022

GOAL I (COLLABORATION)

Administer the Court Improvement Program (CIP) funds to assess current and future needs of the courts, provide a forum for meaningful collaboration, encourage continuous quality improvement, and promote best child welfare and court practices to improve the child welfare system.

Objective: Utilize the CIP funds to execute the strategies of the Supreme Court of Texas Children's Commission.

1. Strategy: Provide regular updates to the Children's Commission and the Systems Improvement, Legal Practice & Process, Training, and Data Committees about Commission initiatives.

Background: The Children's Commission is a statewide, multidisciplinary collaborative body that includes high-level membership from the executive, judicial, and legislative branches of Texas government, along with child welfare partners in the non-profit and private sectors. The Children's Commission holds Commission meetings every four months throughout each year. The Children's Commission receives federal grant funds which are used to operate the Commission, to fund meeting facilitation and travel reimbursement, training expenses and scholarships, and pass-through grants to sub-grantees. The Children's Commission also confers regularly with national organizations and other CIPs and submits annual reports and CIP strategic plans to the Administration for Children and Families (ACF) and to the Supreme Court of Texas. Leadership from both Texas CASA and the Department of Family and Protective Services (DFPS) have a standing position on the Children's Commission and at least one state-level DFPS staff member is on every Children's Commission committee.

The Children's Commission helps institutionalize collaboration by maintaining a statewide multidisciplinary judicially-led commission, holding regular meetings that include child welfare stakeholders, partnering with the state child welfare agency, and partnering with other state and national level executives, partners, and organizations. The Children's Commission creates an environment and maintains the space for stakeholders to collaborate, communicate, and share information on an ongoing basis. The Systems Improvement, Legal Practice & Process, Training, and Data Committees are standing committees that meet before every Children's Commission meeting and monitor related Commission projects and initiatives.

02/25/22 Update: In response to challenges presented by COVID-19, many meetings, trainings, and events transitioned from in-person to virtual formats. The prior Commission meeting was held virtually on September 17, 2021 via Zoom and was streamed live on the Commission's YouTube channel. The Fiscal Year (FY) 2022 Budget and Strategies were approved at the September 2021 meeting.

The Systems Improvement, Legal Practice & Process, Training, and Data Committees met on January 31, February 7, February 3, and January 14 respectively. Each committee received information and updates about current Children's Commission projects and activities and members provided feedback on the progress to date.

The Children’s Commission continued to collaborate with various partners, including, but not limited to, the Office of the Governor, Office of the Attorney General, the Judicial Commission on Mental Health, Texas Juvenile Justice Department, the Texas Alliance of Child and Family Services, The University of Texas School of Social Work, Meadows Mental Health Policy Institute, and the Child Protection Reform Round Table.

Objective: Collaborate with high-level state and judicial leaders, as well as with multidisciplinary child welfare stakeholders, to maintain productive dialogue aimed at strengthening the child welfare system.

2. Strategy: Engage with the Collaborative Council and participate in and provide forums and opportunities for child welfare stakeholders, including individuals with lived experience, to partner and to share information about child welfare practices, policies, needs, and strengths.

Background: The Children’s Commission convenes an Annual Collaborative Council meeting to elicit feedback about member areas of interest and priorities. The Children’s Commission also conducts a bi-monthly collaborative call with DFPS, the Office of Court Administration, and Collaborative Council members as well as numerous other calls and meetings related to Children’s Commission workgroups to provide consistent opportunities to collaborate, share timely information, and assess engagement and areas in need of improvement.

02/25/22 Update: The annual Collaborative Council meeting was held on November 9, 2021 on Zoom. Council members shared their upcoming priority areas of focus and initiatives for 2022. Bi-monthly collaborative calls for 2022 commenced on January 12 and continue to take place every other week.

Objective: Communicate Children’s Commission areas of focus through easily accessible, user-friendly resources for judges, attorneys, and child welfare stakeholders.

3. Strategy: Develop, maintain, and enhance usability and function of the Children’s Commission website, social media, print and online materials, and other communication mediums.

Background: The Children’s Commission maintains a website that features published reports, guides, announcements, scholarships, and training opportunities. CIP grant applications and grant recipient information are also included on the website. Announcements such as the Resource Letter are also relayed through the Commission’s Twitter account, @TXChildrensComm.

02/25/22 Update: The Commission website is routinely updated for content and newly released reports and resources including a webpage dedicated to COVID-19 resources and announcements such as emergency court orders related to child welfare cases. While the website is specific to judges and attorneys, the materials featured are often accessed by additional stakeholders in child welfare. For FY2022, the Children’s Commission is working with OCA to explore a website renovation to expand accessibility and navigation for stakeholders in the Texas child welfare system.

Objective: Confer regularly with the Department of Family and Protective Services (DFPS) on federal plans, audits, and requirements as mandated by federal program instructions.

4. Strategy: Confer with DFPS on the Child and Family Service Reviews, Program Improvement Plans, Child and Family State Plans, and the Court Improvement Program Strategic Plans.

Background: At the foundation of the Children’s Commission is a longstanding collaboration with the state

child welfare agency, the Texas Department of Family and Protective Services. The Children's Commission engages in ongoing participation with ACF and DFPS regarding the DFPS' Child and Family Services Plan (CFSP), Annual Progress and Services Report (APSR), Child and Family Services Review (CFSR) and Program Improvement Plan (PIP), and CIP Strategic Plan. Additionally, at the suggestion of ACF and request of DFPS, the Children's Commission formed an Attorney Advisory Group (AAG) comprised of experienced child welfare attorneys from across the state who have agreed to offer input and perspective on an ad hoc basis via email or conference call on matters of DFPS policy changes when requested by DFPS, gauging the impact of a legislative proposal, or providing feedback on trends or practice issues and concerns.

02/25/22 Update: Children's Commission staff continues to participate in many Department initiatives including participation by the Executive Director and Senior Jurist in Residence on the Public-Private Partnership Committee, the advisory body for the rollout of Community Based Care in Texas.

On December 6, 2021, the Children's Commission attended a Kinship Care Convening that was hosted by Casey Family Programs and included DFPS leadership and staff as well as the Texas Alliance of Child and Family Services. At the convening, experts from Florida provided an overview of how that state developed a successful kinship care program. The Children's Commission will continue to participate in a Kinship Steering Committee that met for the first time on February 15, 2022.

The Children's Commission contacted members of the Attorney Advisory Group in December 2021 to request attorney participation in the Commission's Spring 2022 Forensic Assessment Center Network Round Table Discussion. Several attorney members representing children and parents volunteered to participate in the Round Table Discussion.

Objective: Support county, state, and national child welfare leaders and organizations to enhance knowledge and competency and share experience and expertise with and throughout Texas.

5. Strategy: Provide assistance to and collaborate with local jurisdictions, DFPS, and state and national partners and organizations.

Background: The Children's Commission provides various types of support for child welfare partners and stakeholders including meeting facilitation and support, travel reimbursement for meeting and training event attendees, presentations by Children's Commission staff as requested, and assistance with securing speakers for local, regional, or national events, as appropriate. Children's Commission staff serves on the Public Private Partnership, Education Reach for Texans, and many other stakeholder workgroups and subcommittees formed under the leadership of its child welfare partners.

02/25/22 Update: The Children's Commission provides attorney scholarships for the American Bar Association biennial conferences, as detailed in Strategy #34. In 2022, the Children's Commission received a request from one judge to attend the conference and this scholarship will be covered under this strategy as assistance to local jurisdictions.

In response to the growing numbers of children without placement (often referred to as CWOP), the Children's Commission initiated a Judicial Workgroup on Capacity. Beginning in June 2021, the workgroup meets on a monthly basis to provide a forum for judges from jurisdictions throughout the state to brainstorm effective approaches to identifying placement options for children without placement. In the long term, this group may provide an opportunity to discuss how judges can appropriately participate in developing foster care capacity in their communities.

GOAL II (SYSTEMS IMPROVEMENT)

Execute innovative projects aimed at ensuring equity, fairness, and justice for children, youth, and families; promoting judicial leadership in courts and communities; and expanding court and child welfare system capacity to support continuous, systemic improvement.

Objective: Encourage judicial leadership through Jurist in Residence (JIR) support to ensure that judges are equipped to make well-informed decisions and conduct hearings that will contribute to better outcomes for children and families.

6. Strategy: Utilize Jurists in Residence to promote best practices to the judiciary and support the legal and child welfare systems through judicial leadership and expertise.

Background: The Jurist in Residence position was created to foster judicial leadership and promote greater expertise among judges hearing child welfare matters. The JIR develops relationships with retired and sitting judges, and acts as a consultant, trainer, and speaker to provide expert and seasoned judicial advice on matters affecting courts and legal system handling of child welfare cases and issues. The JIR activities include continued emphasis on elevating judicial leaders with expertise and interests related to prevention of removal to foster care, child and family well-being, and improving child and family voice in child welfare system reform. The Children's Commission has two Jurists in Residence: Judge Rob Hofmann of the 452nd District Court in Mason County and Judge Piper McCraw of the 469th District Court in Collin County.

Since late February 2020, both JIRs have assisted the Children's Commission in handling matters related to the COVID-19 pandemic and its effect on courts and judicial processes across the state. Both JIRs assist with analyzing and reviewing potential legislation during the legislative session. JIRs participate in CIP-OCA-DFPS stakeholder collaborative calls as well as multiple Children's Commission meetings regarding Emergency Orders, proposed legislation and rules, Community Based Care, prevention and early intervention, placement capacity, and other issues.

02/25/22 Update: Between September 2021 and February 2022, a few examples of JIR activities include:

- Attended multiple Supreme Court of Texas Remote Proceedings Task Force meetings, Fall 2021, Virtual
- Participated in planning calls for the Children's Commission Child Welfare Judges Conference, September, Virtual
- Attended Children's Commission Judicial Workgroup on Capacity monthly meetings, September 2021-February 2022, Virtual
- Attended Children's Commission Equity Workgroup and Mission Subgroup meetings, September 30, November 22, and December 2, Virtual
- Attended Children's Commission Commercial Sexual Exploitation of Children Judicial Workgroup meetings, December 6 and February 10, Virtual
- Participated in the National Council of Juvenile and Family Court Judges National Conversation about Race, September 21, Virtual

- Attended multiple Children’s Commission Qualified Residential Treatment Program Legal Workgroup meetings, September-December, Virtual
- Facilitated the Children’s Commission Senate Bill 1575 Workgroup meeting, September 30, Virtual
- Attended Public Private Partnership meetings, October 8 and January 14, Virtual
- Attended the Rural Justice Collaborative Advisory Council meeting, October 13-14, Virtual
- Attended the Texas Center for the Judiciary Legislative Updates Webinar, October 25, Virtual
- Presented at, facilitated, and attended the Children’s Commission Child Welfare Judges Conference, October 25-27, Virtual
- Continued work as board member for National Council of Juvenile and Family Court Judges and attended Board meetings, November 13, Reno, NV
- Participated in planning calls for the Children’s Commission Reasonable Efforts Judicial Academy, November 2021-January 2022, Virtual
- Participated in a ProPublica interview for the Rural Justice Collaborative, January 5, Virtual
- Presented at and attended the Texas Center for the Judiciary Family Justice Conference, January 13-14, Georgetown
- Presented at and served as faculty for the Children’s Commission Reasonable Efforts Judicial Academy, January 27-28, Virtual
- Facilitated the Systems Improvement Committee meeting, January 31, Virtual
- Participated in CIP-OCA-DFPS Stakeholder collaborative calls
- Participated in calls with Executive Director
- Participated in multiple Children’s Commission meetings with leadership and staff regarding Emergency Orders, Legislation/Rules and other issues, Virtual

Objective: Promote awareness of and embed a culture and practice among the judiciary and legal community around Trauma-Informed Care.

7. Strategy: Partner with trauma and mental health advocates and agencies to implement and apply principles of Trauma-Informed Care in the respective disciplines.

Background: In July 2017, the Children’s Commission launched the Statewide Collaborative on Trauma-Informed Care (SCTIC) to elevate trauma-informed policy and practices in the Texas child welfare system by creating a statewide strategy to support system reform, organizational leadership, cross-systems collaboration, and community-led efforts with data-informed initiatives. Based on the work of the SCTIC, the Children’s Commission published a final report in February 2019 entitled Building a Trauma-Informed Child Welfare System: A Blueprint. The SCTIC endeavors to raise awareness about Trauma-Informed Care through training and educational opportunities; create a trauma-informed and trauma-responsive child welfare system that better meets the needs of children and families who experience trauma; and partner with other state and national trauma-informed workgroups and collaboratives. The SCTIC continues under the guidance of an Implementation Task Force and utilizes the Blueprint to direct the SCTIC’s work.

02/25/22 Update: The SCTIC developed a Judicial Workgroup in connection with the FY2022 grant to Texas Center for Child and Family Studies (TCCFS) to support implementation of trauma-informed court practices at several project court sites, known as the Trauma-Informed Court Project. The Judicial Workgroup met in December 2021 to discuss the process for selecting project court sites. The Workgroup members consist of judges working to implement trauma-informed practices in their courts and judges who presented at the Children’s Commission Judicial Trauma Institute in April 2021.

The Trauma-Informed Court Project planning team includes Chief Justice Darlene Byrne of the Third Court of Appeals, Judge Carlos Villalon Jr. of the Child Protection Court of the Rio Grande Valley West, Katy Bourgeois and Tara Reed with TCCFS, and Executive Director Jamie Bernstein and Staff Attorney Jocelyn Fowler with the Children’s Commission. In January 2022, six courts were selected to serve as project sites for the Trauma-Informed Court Project: Judge Carol Chaney (Waller County Court at Law); Judge Linda Dunson (309th Family District Court); Judge Angela Graves-Harrington (246th Family District Court); Judge Rhonda Hunter (303rd Family District Court); Judge Andrea James (2nd Region Child Protection Court No. 2); and Judge Cheryl Vaughan (Child Protection Court Eighth Region North). Initial consultations between planning team members and each project court site were conducted to gather information about goals and potential implementation plans for each site. The planning team is developing a cohort training for all court teams which will launch individual court project site planning.

The Children’s Commission and its partners (such as the State Bar of Texas) continue to receive requests and questions regarding the new attorney ad litem training requirements on trauma and trauma-informed practices under Texas Family Code 107.004. On February 24, 2022, Chief Justice Byrne presented to the Hill Country Ad Litem Seminar on the elements required under the statute and will record a version of her presentation for the State Bar of Texas to make available in TexasBarCLE’s online classroom.

Objective: Support efforts to address equity in the Texas child welfare system so that children, youth, and families receive services and supports that meet their individual needs.

8. Strategy: Identify and promote data-driven, cross-disciplinary opportunities to address disproportionality and disparities among children, youth, and families involved in child welfare cases.

Background: The Children’s Commission is committed to the goal of reducing racial and ethnic disproportionality and disparities in the child welfare system through development and deployment of judicial and attorney resources aimed at increasing awareness, sharing data and information, as well as disseminating best practices for dealing with disproportionality and disparities systemically and locally.

02/25/22 Update: The Equity Workgroup is chaired by the Children’s Commission’s Equity Advisor Sheila Craig and met on September 28 and December 2, 2021. In December, the Workgroup finalized a draft mission statement to direct its work and will finalize the statement at its next meeting.

In January 2022, a Texas team was accepted into the Capacity Building Center for Courts’ (CBCC) Race Equity Workshop series. The workshop is focused on providing technical assistance to states as they develop or continue progress on projects focused on addressing disproportionality and disparities in child welfare. The Texas team includes Equity Workgroup members Children’s Commission Equity Advisor Sheila Craig, 126th District Court Judge Hon. Aurora Martinez Jones, Office of Court Administration Specialty and Children’s Courts Program Manager Anissa Johnson, Office of Court Administration Senior Data Analyst Jeff Cox, and Children’s Commission Staff Attorney Jocelyn Fowler. The CBCC led two meetings in February for all participating state teams covering an overview of updated disproportionality data and creating opportunities for state teams to share ideas. The CBCC Texas liaison will next conduct

sessions with the Texas team to provide technical assistance as the team and larger workgroup continue developing projects around training and data.

Objective: Improve and expand engagement of youth in court hearings and related decision-making so that children and youth feel more involved and assured that their voice is heard and is important to the decisions being made about their lives.

9. Strategy: Elevate the importance of engaging children and youth in the case planning and court process as well as promote the inclusion of young adults with lived experience in statewide system improvement efforts.

Background: In FY2018, the Children’s Commission helped the Texas Network of Youth Services (TNOYS) to establish a Statewide Young Adult Leadership Council (YALC) designed to elevate and incorporate youth voice in statewide policy and administrative procedure discussions, particularly in the child welfare system. The YALC is a 10-month long leadership development program for young people with lived expertise. The Commission also provides funding each year to print the Foster Youth “Aging Out” Guide published by Texas RioGrande Legal Aid.

02/25/22 Update:

Young Adult Leadership Council: In FY2022, TNOYS onboarded a new YALC cohort of 15 young people with lived experiences of system involvement, with plans to continue to practice youth-adult partnerships through various projects. In addition to ongoing meetings and training, new projects include, but are not limited to, a TNOYS Youth Voices Program with youth-informed best practices and procedures on how to engage youth and young adults with lived experiences in storytelling, a TNOYS AmeriCorps program that will include ongoing cross-training with the YALC, and multiple listening sessions that will inform work with other stakeholders such as the Children’s Commission’s legal representation project. YALC members are also engaging in youth participatory research and youth-led consultation and training and recently participated in a panel on the experiences of youth in foster care covering such topics as CWOP, normalcy, and transitioning into adulthood.

Foster Youth Aging Out Guide: The Children’s Commission provided funding to Texas RioGrande Legal Aid to update the design and content of the online and print versions of the 8th Edition of *A Guide for Those “Aging Out” of Foster Care in Texas*. The updated version was completed in November 2021.

Objective: Emphasize the need for normalcy for children and youth who experience foster care by providing clear guidance on age-appropriate activities and real-world application of normalcy principles.

10. Strategy: Develop role-based information about how different stakeholders can support normalcy for children and youth in foster care.

Background: The Children’s Commission held a Round Table on Normalcy in February 2019. Subsequently, the Commission provided grant funding in FY2020 for Texas CASA to create a role-based guide regarding normalcy for children and youth in foster care. The goal of the guide is to inform the child welfare system participants - attorneys, judges, CASAs, foster parents, congregate care staff, kinship caregivers, community partners, agency employees, education partners, and others - about normalcy and about best practices for each of their roles in promoting and attaining normalcy for children and youth in foster care. Another goal of the guide is to address challenging topics related to normalcy, including liability concerns, transportation, social media, unsupervised activities, dating, etc.

02/25/22 Update: On February 2, 2022, Texas CASA released “[Normalcy Matters: A Guide to Supporting](#)

[Children & Youth in Texas Foster Care](#),” as well as a companion [video](#) to provide education about normalcy, including the importance of normalcy and how judges, attorneys, stakeholders, and others can support normalcy for children and youth who experience the Texas child welfare system.

Objective: Support statewide efforts to transition from a reactive child welfare system to a prevention-oriented system that aims to maintain child safety and keep families together.

11. Strategy: Engage judges and lawyers, in collaboration with DFPS’ Prevention and Early Intervention (PEI) division and other partners, in systemic efforts to prevent child abuse and neglect and address occurrences of child abuse and neglect while maintaining family preservation.

Background: The Children’s Commission collaborates closely with DFPS on the implementation of the Family First Prevention Services Act (FFPSA), as required by the federal Administration for Children and Families. FFPSA restructures federal child welfare funding, particularly Title IV-E and Title IV-B of the Social Security Act, which Texas uses to pay for services for children in foster care and their families. FFPSA seeks to reduce entry in foster care, to limit the use of congregate care, and to increase access to substance abuse and mental health services. There are certain training provisions directly impacting the courts and Court Improvement Programs, but beyond that, FFPSA mandates that states seeking Title IV-E funding create and provide more robust prevention services for families in the state’s child welfare system. The Children’s Commission collaborates with Casey Family Programs and other national workgroups on best practices for implementation of all FFPSA provisions, including the development of IV-E prevention programs and court involvement in encouraging a primary prevention approach.

02/25/22 Update: In January 2021, DFPS, the Texas Health and Human Services Commission (HHSC), the Texas Department of State Health Services (DSHS), and the Commission joined the national Thriving Families, Safer Children initiative, which is designed to be transformative in the way jurisdictions work with families and communities to keep children free from harm. Through this program, Texas, along with other jurisdictions from across the country, continues its work on addressing race equity, distinguishing poverty from neglect, engaging individuals with lived experience, and building capacity to support families and children.

Commission staff continues to participate on the PEI Prevention Framework Workgroup which has a goal of developing a prevention framework to guide communities throughout Texas. The workgroup last met on January 20, 2022.

During 2021, the Prevention and Early Intervention (PEI) Division of DFPS proposed creating a new position of an Early Intervention Court Liaison in identified Child Protection Courts. PEI partnered with the Children’s Commission and the Office of Court Administration (OCA) to identify Texas communities that would benefit from the Court Liaison position. The Court Liaison will act as a special assistant to the court and will serve to identify and connect early childhood and family support programs to the local Child Protection Courts and community. The Court Liaisons would serve as a convener within their communities and offer a judicial perspective within community stakeholder meetings. They would also serve to identify local services to help support prevention efforts. Galveston, Bell, and Lubbock Counties will serve as pilot sites, and interviews for the positions are currently in progress.

Objective: Encourage the improvement of education outcomes for children and youth in foster care, leading to a more productive and stable adult life.

12. Strategy: Identify opportunities to develop sustainable partnerships between legal, child welfare, and

education stakeholders in an effort to identify and address the educational needs and goals of children and youth who experience foster care.

Background: Since the inception of the Education Committee in 2010 and the release of the Texas Blueprint in 2012, the Children’s Commission has convened a multidisciplinary, statewide effort aimed at improving education outcomes for children and youth in foster care. The Foster Care and Education (FC&Ed) Committee was established in 2015 to continue the implementation of the Texas Blueprint recommendations. In FY2019, the structure of the FC&Ed collaboration shifted from a workgroup model to a project-centered model. The FC&Ed Committee will continue to develop priorities and provide oversight for the statewide effort. As projects are identified, small groups will each meet periodically with a defined scope, deliverables, and a timeline. The core principles of strengthening collaboration between the education, courts, and child welfare systems, developing cross-training opportunities, and encouraging data-driven decision making remain fundamental to the FC&Ed Committee model.

02/25/22 Update: The FC&Ed Committee met on December 14, 2021 and identified potential new projects for the workgroups. The FC&Ed Committee identified the following priority areas:

- Foster parents and kinship placements;
- Data and information sharing; and
- Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA).

The Foster Parent and Kinship Placement Workgroup will focus on expanding educational knowledge, involvement, and supports to caregivers. The workgroup last met in January 2022.

The Data and Information Sharing Workgroup will focus on the momentum and recommendations created through the Foster Care & Student Success Texas Data and Trends Report of 2018. The workgroup last met in January 2022.

The Every Student Succeeds Act Workgroup drafted a School of Origin one-pager that is undergoing final agency review. The workgroup will continue drafting charts and one-pagers on school of origin, best interest decisions, transportation, and cross-system collaboration in order to provide additional guidance to the child welfare and education communities. The workgroup last met in January 2022.

Objective: Establish and support meaningful relationships with tribal nations and promote awareness, education, and application of the Indian Child Welfare Act (ICWA) so that Indian children and families experience equitable treatment in keeping with their customs and beliefs.

13. Strategy: Continue the mutually respectful and ongoing relationships with Texas’ three federally recognized tribes and other tribal nations living in Texas.

Background: The Children’s Commission supports partnering with system stakeholders to promote ongoing knowledge and understanding of ICWA and its importance. The Commission also works with national ICWA and leading organizations on understanding and implementation of the Federal Rule and Bureau of Indian Affairs (BIA) Guidelines. The Children’s Commission also partners with DFPS in supporting tribal/state collaborative meetings and collaborates with the Capacity Building Center for Courts and the participants of the CIP ICWA Constituency Group. Commission staff continues to monitor the lawsuit challenging the constitutionality of ICWA, *Brackeen v. Haaland* (formerly *Brackeen v. Bernhardt*). Commission staff also maintains contact with the three federally recognized Tribes in Texas during the COVID-19 pandemic and continues to communicate any resources that may be helpful.

02/25/22 Update: The Children’s Commission continues to monitor the *Brackeen* case. All parties filed Petitions for a Writ of Certiorari to the Supreme Court of the United States but there have been no updates from SCOTUS on the Petition. The resource letter issued by the Children’s Commission on July 1, 2021 provides a summary of the status of ICWA and the lawsuit to date based on the Fifth Circuit Court of Appeals’ April 6, 2021 *en banc* decision. The Commission will monitor progress of the case and provide updates, as available.

The Commission continues to be a regular participant in the Court Improvement Program ICWA Constituency Group monthly calls organized by the Capacity Building Center for Courts.

Objective: Promote awareness of and provide training, resources, and support so that judges and lawyers can assist in preventing and responding to the commercial sexual exploitation of children and youth in foster care.

14. Strategy: Partner with national, state, and local leaders to understand the scope of the issue and engage judges and lawyers on the need to prevent and address commercial sexual exploitation of children and youth in foster care.

Background: The Children’s Commission partners with many key stakeholders with a goal of preventing and addressing commercial sexual exploitation of children and youth in foster care. In addition to serving on the Texas Human Trafficking Prevention Task Force, the Children’s Commission also works with the Office of the Texas Governor’s Child Sex Trafficking Team, the DFPS Human Trafficking and Child Exploitation team, and the Office of Court Administration to develop strategies to improve judicial handling of child welfare cases where children and youth are at high risk of becoming trafficking victims. The Children’s Commission is focused primarily on providing information to judges and attorneys responsible for child welfare cases to raise awareness about human trafficking as it impacts children and youth involved with the child welfare system. The Children’s Commission also participates in state and national trainings on human trafficking to stay informed about successful strategies to combat trafficking and develop expertise to relay information to Texas judges and attorneys as needed.

On January 7, 2021, the Commission held its first Human Trafficking Judicial Workgroup meeting comprised of fourteen judges from across the state. The workgroup’s purpose is to explore ways judicial leaders can be involved in discussions about prevention and identification of commercial sexual exploitation of children, particularly children within the child welfare system. Since that time, the workgroup changed its terminology to address the commercial sexual exploitation of children in order to reflect the more commonly used verbiage used by others in the field.

02/25/22 Update: The Commercial Sexual Exploitation of Children Judicial Workgroup last met on December 6, 2021 and February 19, 2022. On Thursday, January 20, 2022, the workgroup presented a free, 1.5-hour webcast entitled “The Texas Response to the Commercial Sexual Exploitation of Children.” Panelists from the Office of the Texas Governor, the Texas Department of Family and Protective Services, the Texas Alliance of Child and Family Services, Texas CASA, and the Texas Juvenile Justice Department provided insight into their efforts to prevent, identify, and support children at risk and survivors of commercial sexual exploitation. The webcast was moderated by the judicial co-Chairs of the workgroup, the Hon. Ami Larson, Associate Judge of the Travis County Juvenile Court and the Hon. Selena Mireles, Associate Judge of the 4th and 5th Administrative Judicial Regions Child Protection Court.

The Commission staff participates in the ACF Region VI Human Trafficking Workgroup to share best practices and better coordinate with other states on combatting human trafficking, including taking part

in a subgroup discussion on human trafficking law analysis on December 16, 2021.

In February 2021, Commission staff joined a monthly School-Aged Human Trafficking Prevention and Awareness Statewide Implementation Workgroup which focuses on prevention and awareness of human trafficking within Texas schools. This workgroup last met February 2, 2022.

The Children's Commission participated in the recent meetings of the Texas Human Trafficking Prevention Task Force. The Task Force last met on November 3, 2021 to discuss projects designed to expand trauma informed education and training to members of law enforcement and the legal community.

Objective: Create opportunities to bring together subject matter experts, judicial and executive branch leaders, and key policy makers to examine important and urgent issues, and to identify recommendations and solutions.

15. Strategy: Work with DFPS and other child welfare stakeholders to identify critical and urgent topics for Round Table discussions and hold Round Table events as needed.

Background: Round Table discussions are designed to address key, urgent issues affecting the Texas child welfare system through a half-day program that is facilitated by a subject-matter and legal expert. The topics vary year to year and the number of Round Tables hosted each year also varies according to the interest of stakeholders and issues demanding attention. The Children Commission's role usually consists of forming a small workgroup to discuss the overall purpose, creating an invitation and distribution list, securing a venue, handling all invitations, RSVPs, travel reimbursements, and producing a written report or paper within about 4 to 6 months following the Round Table event.

02/25/22 Update: Over 15 years ago, DFPS established the Forensic Assessment Center Network (FACN) to allow for specialized pediatricians to be available for consultation on cases of suspected child abuse and neglect. During the 87th Texas Regular Legislative Session, Senate Bill 1578 added Texas Family Code Section 261.3017 which requires DFPS and the Children's Commission to evaluate the department's use of the network and develop joint recommendations for improvement. Areas of focus will include the evaluation of agreements between the department and the network as well as the best practices for using assessments provided by the network in connection with abuse and neglect investigations conducted by the department. The Commission will host a Round Table discussion in April 2022, to bring together diverse perspectives on how the Forensic Assessment Center Network is used in Texas and to identify opportunities for improvement.

16. Strategy: Assess the impact of QRTPs on placements for children and youth, including the use of other congregate care facilities.

Background: Texas elected to delay implementation of certain provisions of FFPSA related to the use of congregate care, which mandate that Court Improvement Programs provide training and education to judges and other legal system stakeholders on the limitations on funding for use of non-foster family home placements. However, provisions related to Qualified Residential Treatment Programs (QRTPs) went into effect in October 2021. Under Senate Bill 1575 (87th Regular Legislative Session), the Children's Commission will partner with DFPS to examine the oversight of, and best practices related to, residential treatment center placements, including placements in QRTPs.

02/25/22 Update: The Children's Commission, as well as multiple judges and attorneys from various jurisdictions in Texas, participated in meetings with DFPS staff on October 12 and November 16, 2021 to discuss the court process for QRTP placement reviews. Children's Commission and DFPS staff also met

on December 14, 2021, January 4, 2022, and February 9, 2022 to discuss a training on the legal components of a QRTP placement.

The Children’s Commission partnered with DFPS to develop a plan for implementation of Senate Bill 1575, including the creation of a workgroup to oversee the goals set out in the bill. The Senate Bill 1575 Workgroup met on September 30, 2021 and will meet three more times over a twelve-month period. The workgroup decided to organize its work into two subgroups: RTC Best Practices and Legal. The subgroups began meeting on a monthly basis in November 2021. In October 2022, the Children’s Commission will submit a related report to the Legislature.

Objective: Address the needs of children and youth who experience both the child welfare and juvenile justice systems and encourage cross-system partnerships through judicial leadership.

17. Strategy: Prioritize and implement the agency coordination, data, definitions, judicial practices, legal representation and advocacy, and training recommendations developed by the Dual Status Task Force.

Background: The Children’s Commission has worked since its inception to strengthen courts for children and families in the Texas child welfare system. Federal CIP funds require a focus on children who are abused and neglected but children involved in the juvenile justice system experience many of the same challenges and needs. The Texas Judicial Council recommended to the Supreme Court of Texas in 2018 that the Children’s Commission should convene a task force to study and report on issues relating to youth with involvement in the juvenile justice and child welfare systems. The Dual Status Task Force (DSTF) was formed to establish a common, statewide definition(s) for the population, identify resources needed to meet the needs of dual status youth, and make other recommendations as may be necessary to improve outcomes for dual status youth. The DSTF met five times over an 18-month time period, and created the Agency Coordination, Data, Definitions, Judicial Practices, Legal Representation & Advocacy, and Training Workgroups to develop recommendations for improved handling of dual status cases.

02/25/22 Update: The [Dual Status Task Force Report](#) was released in December 2021 and captured recommendations that were formulated over an eighteen-month time period, beginning in July 2019. The report contains various recommendations for agency coordination, data, definitions, legal representation and advocacy, judicial practices, and training that highlight the unique needs of this population of youth.

The Child Protection Court Dual Status Pilot is underway in the Child Protection Court of the Rio Grande Valley West, the Child Protection Court of Taylor County, and the Child Protection Court of the Hill Country. Researchers at the University of Texas at San Antonio plan to distribute a survey to the participating stakeholders to assess the impact of the dual status initiative in each jurisdiction.

GOAL III (LEGAL PRACTICE & PROCESS)

Assist trial and appellate courts, judges, and legal advocates to ensure that children, youth, and families involved with child welfare experience a legal system in which they have access to justice and their rights are protected.

Objective: Improve legal representation so that parents, children, and DFPS experience high-quality court proceedings.

18. Strategy: Convene and support a Legal Representation Committee to sustain efforts to ensure high-quality legal representation for parents, children, and DFPS.

Background: When a family is involved in a child welfare proceeding, quality legal counsel is essential for all parties to ensure that the court strikes the appropriate balance between the rights and duties of all parties involved. The Children's Commission has maintained a Legal Representation Committee (LRC) since its inception. The Committee exists to identify training needs, advise child welfare system stakeholders on best legal and judicial system practices, evaluate proposed statutory amendments, assess the quality of legal representation throughout the state, and help ensure that court proceedings safeguard due process, promote child and family engagement, and produce quality legal representation outcomes for the children and families involved.

02/25/22 Update: The LRC last met on February 11, 2022 to discuss the status of several committee projects.

Commission staff are continuing to work with DFPS on the Task Force on Court-Appointed Legal Representation's recommendation regarding the use of Federal Title IV-E Funds. A collaborative meeting was held on February 4, 2022, between DFPS, the Michigan Court Improvement Program, and Michigan Health and Human Services to learn more about Michigan's approach to utilizing Title IV-E funds. Commission staff also met with the Texas Indigent Defense Commission (TIDC) regarding Title IV-E funds and plan to arrange a collaborative meeting between DFPS and TIDC in March 2022.

The LRC continues to work on several projects to enhance parents' and children's understanding of the attorney-client relationship. The LRC created two workgroups to oversee the design, creation, and distribution of materials explaining the attorney's role. One workgroup focused on designing materials for children, youth, foster parents, and relative caregivers, and the other workgroup focused on designing materials for parents.

The children's materials workgroup completed a [Coloring Book](#) for children ages 6-12 and the book is available as a free download on the Children's Commission website in both English and Spanish versions. The workgroup will collaborate with the YALC. The workgroup met with the YALC on December 10, 2021 to discuss youth priorities for videos that explain the attorney-client relationship. The next meeting of the workgroup and the YALC will be in March 2022.

The parent's materials workgroup held its first meeting on November 19, 2021 and decided that in addition to developing materials specific to fathers and incarcerated parents, the workgroup is interested in developing lived experience parent videos. The next meeting of the workgroup will be March 1, 2022.

The LRC created a standing Tool Kit Committee which is responsible for updating The Tool Kit for Attorneys Representing Parents and Children in Child Protection Cases at the conclusion of each legislative session. The Tool Kit Committee completed its revisions of existing sections as well as drafts

of four new sections: Court Ordered Services, Reinstatement of Parental Rights, Medical Abuse and Neglect, and Children Without Placement. Drafts of the new sections were reviewed by the LRC on February 11, 2022, and Commission staff are in the process of making final revisions based on the LRC feedback and is on schedule to publish the new version of the Tool Kit in March 2022.

The LRC DFPS Representation Subcommittee is updating the Tool Kit for Attorneys Representing DFPS. This will be the first update to the DFPS Tool Kit since it was published in 2018. Current updates include statutory changes and additions of several new sections including FFPSA, re-instatement of parental rights, and service on parents in foreign countries.

The next meeting of the Legal Representation Committee will be in the third quarter of FY2022.

Objective: Encourage standards of practice for attorneys representing parties in child welfare cases so that attorneys throughout the state provide high-quality legal representation.

19. Strategy: Support development and adoption of Standards of Representation for attorneys representing parents, children, and DFPS in child welfare cases.

Background: Though attorneys for parents and children are required by the Texas Family Code to become familiar with the American Bar Association (ABA) standards of practice for attorneys who represent parents and children in abuse and neglect cases, Texas does not require compliance with the ABA standards as a condition of appointment, nor has Texas adopted its own standards of practice for court-appointed attorneys. The Children's Commission 2018 Legal Representation Study surveyed stakeholders regarding the effect that the lack of enforceable standards of practice has on the legal representation of parents and children. Across stakeholder groups, participants demonstrated a high level of confidence that the creation and enforcement of standards would improve the quality of representation, including 70% of responding court-appointed attorneys indicating that standards would have a positive effect.

02/25/22 Update: The Task Force on Court-Appointed Legal Representation's Final Report released in May 2021 recommended the creation of Texas-specific standards of representation as a key element of raising the quality of legal representation for parents and children and provided a roadmap for their creation by identifying issues the standards should address. At the November 12, 2021 LRC meeting, members heard from Sheri Danz, the Deputy Director of the Colorado Office of the Child Representative regarding the creation and utilization of standards of representation in Colorado. Commission staff are continuing to research the creation of Texas-specific standards and are in conversations with the Texas State Bar about initiating the process.

Objective: Raise the level of understanding and expertise for attorneys by highlighting opportunities for specialization in child welfare law.

20. Strategy: Assist the Texas Board of Legal Specialization (TBLS) Advisory and Exam Committees in efforts to certify Texas attorneys as specialists in child welfare law.

Background: On February 14, 2017, the Texas Supreme Court officially recognized Child Welfare Law as the 20th area of certified legal specialization. Children's Commission staff serve as the chair of the Exam Commission, which is responsible for drafting and grading the certification exam. The Children's Commission partners with TBLS to provide reimbursement scholarships to cover application and exam fees for TBLS Child Welfare Law exam applicants who successfully pass the exam. Also, for several years the Children's Commission has offered reimbursement of either the application fee or the certification

exam fee for Texas attorneys and judges who successfully qualify for and pass the National Association of Counsel for Children's (NACC) Child Welfare Law Specialist (CWLS) Exam. The Children's Commission has not received a reimbursement request for the CWLS exam since FY2017 and will phase out reimbursement in FY2022.

02/25/22 Update: The 2021 Child Welfare Board Certification Exam was administered by TBLS on October 19, 2021. Nineteen attorneys sat for the exam and seven passed the exam to become certified. The Children's Commission will continue to reimburse exam fees upon request for attorneys who pass the exam and become certified as detailed on the Commission's website.

TBLS is accepting attorney applications to become board certified in child welfare law in 2022, and the application filing deadline is March 31, 2022. Successful applicants will be notified in the summer of 2022 of their ability to sit for the certification exam in the fall of 2022.

Also, TBLS recently clarified its policy regarding the CWLS certification offered by NACC. Beginning in 2009, TBLS accredited NACC to certify attorneys as CWLS. The CWLS examination only covers federal law, and no TBLS certification for Texas child welfare law existed at the time. However, TBLS has certified child welfare law as a specialty area since 2018 and the practice of child welfare law includes a substantial component of Texas law. Per TBLS accreditation standards, because TBLS certifies child welfare law as a specialty and child welfare practice is substantially based on Texas law, NACC will no longer be able to certify Texas attorneys as CWLS who have not previously been board certified by TBLS in child welfare law. NACC was notified of this provision in the accreditation standards in 2020 and the provision only applies to Texas attorneys seeking CWLS certification after January 1, 2021. Texas attorneys who obtained CWLS certification prior to January 1, 2021 are not required to first become board certified by TBLS.

Objective: Develop resources to help parents involved in the child welfare system to navigate the process, encourage authentic parent engagement, and ensure parental rights are protected.

21. Strategy: Convene and support a Parent Resource Workgroup and maintain the Parent Resource Guide to sustain efforts to increase parental understanding and engagement in the child welfare system.

Background: The Children's Commission supports a Parent Resource Group which is made up of parent mentors, parent advocates, parent attorneys, DFPS staff, and other interested stakeholders. Prior to establishing the Texas Legal Services Center Family Helpline (for more information, see Strategy #22 below), the Children's Commission partnered with the University of Texas and other stakeholders to produce the Parent Resource Guide, which is available in print and online on the Children's Commission website as well as on many other stakeholder websites, in both English and Spanish.

02/25/22 Update: The Parent Resource Workgroup met on January 25, 2022 and identified topics for a potential set of webinars related to the attorney-client relationship and using trauma-informed practices to raise the quality of representation. The workgroup will finalize content for these two webinars and identify potential panelists in the coming months. The Parent Resource Workgroup also discussed the status of its Prelitigation Resource Guide, which was created with the assistance of the Texas Legal Services Center Family Helpline. Updates made to DFPS policy related to Family-Based Safety Services were recently added to the prelitigation guide, and entire guide will be reviewed by Commission staff once it is finalized. The workgroup plans to develop a regular review and update process for this guide in addition to the original Parent Resource Guide and will focus on developing the above webinar content this year.

22. Strategy: Support efforts to provide early and reliable access to information and resources for Texas families through programs such as the Texas Legal Services Center Family Helpline.

Background: Since 2017, the Children’s Commission has partnered with Access to Justice and the Children’s Justice Act to fund the Texas Legal Services Center (TLSC) to establish the Family Helpline for Strong Families and Safe Children (Family Helpline), which provides easy, statewide access for parents and family members to basic information, education, and resources addressing parental rights as they relate to CPS Investigations, the provision of Family-Based Safety Services (FBSS), Parental Child Safety Placements, Chapter 34 non-parent agreements, termination of parental rights, custody, access, visitation, service plans, the court’s role in conducting hearings and oversight, right to legal counsel, non-offending parents, minor parents, incarcerated parents, survivors of family violence, intergenerational issues, and other similar situations.

02/25/22 Update: During FY2021, the Family Helpline completed a total of 1,714 calls and provided assistance to 1,608 individual callers about child welfare legal issues across the state of Texas. Of the calls completed, 1,461 were from first-time callers and 253 calls were from callers seeking additional assistance after their initial call. The calls originated from 149 counties across Texas and 66 calls originated from out of state residents with matters related to a Texas child welfare issue. The five highest call volumes per county originated from Harris, Dallas, Bexar, Tarrant, and Travis counties. The highest call volume per type of caller was received from parents, followed by grandparents and extended family members. The top three referral sources to the Family Helpline were internet searches, DFPS, and referrals from the Texas Legal Services Center and its website.

The Family Helpline continues to fill the niche of providing legal information at the stage of child welfare cases where court-appointed attorneys are not available. Approximately 63% of callers reported that they had an open CPS case, 28% of which were in the investigations stage of the case. Callers also inquired about children in the Temporary Managing Conservatorship (TMC) of DFPS, issues related to FBSS, Permanent Managing Conservatorship (PMC), Alternative Response cases, and Court Ordered Services cases. Approximately 20% of callers had questions related to a closed CPS matter, and 14% of callers had inquiries about preventing child abuse or neglect or general child safety.

The Texas Family Helpline staff continue to take advantage of the ease and efficiency of watching CPS virtual court hearings across the state via YouTube to gain a better understanding of local practices in order to better inform callers across the state. The Family Helpline is also working on creating content to better assist callers, including drafting a tool kit regarding interventions, guidance regarding safety issues between parents who are not in a relationship, and assisting with the Parent Resource Workgroup’s Pre-litigation Resource Guide.

Objective: Ensure availability of high-quality judicial resources and tools that provide clear, relevant information about law, policy, and best practices.

23. Strategy: Maintain a comprehensive Texas Child Protection Law Bench Book for judges hearing child welfare cases.

Background: The Children’s Commission maintains a Bench Book that outlines the state and federal statutory requirements for judges handling child protection cases, including topical sections and checklists. The Bench Book also highlights special issues and includes best and promising practices. It is updated annually with new information, as needed, and is disseminated to judges at training events and upon request. The Bench Book is also hosted on the Children’s Commission website and through

LawBox, both versions of which can be accessed at no cost through the Commission website.

02/25/22 Update: The Texas Child Protection Law Bench Book is updated annually and was revised in October 2021 to include updates throughout from the 87th Regular Legislative Session and new chapters on FFPSA and domestic violence. Additionally, a new Bench Card on remote hearings was created. The online version of the [Texas Child Protection Law Bench Book](#) is available as a free, downloadable PDF for print and also as an interactive resource through LawBox. The Bench Book Committee will convene in Spring 2022 to discuss ideas for new chapters and checklists for the 2022 Bench Book update.

Objective: Improve and expand engagement of families and caregivers in court hearings so that court hearings are higher quality and more meaningful for the families and children involved.

24. Strategy: Support increased child and family engagement through the use of technology.

Background: The Children’s Commission continues to support a video conferencing project which enables children involved in child abuse and neglect cases to participate in permanency and placement review hearings without being physically present in the courtroom. The Children’s Commission provides funding to OCA via a grant to host and support the hardware and software required to facilitate video conferencing between courts and residential placements (primarily Residential Treatment Centers).

The outbreak of COVID-19 forced a monumental change in youth participation in court. In March 2020, OCA provided licenses for the Zoom video conferencing tool to all Texas courts to allow courts to conduct virtual hearings. The necessity of virtual hearings and universal court access to the video conferencing technology has allowed more courts and youth to attend hearings virtually and for courts and youth to engage together and determine how to make best use of the virtual environment. For nearly two years, Zoom has been used for video conferencing hearings and the Child Protection Courts (CPCs) have provided feedback to support Zoom as the preferred video conferencing application. The Children’s Commission is committed to finding ways to maintain the benefits of virtual hearings as courts transition back to more in-person and/or hybrid hearings.

02/25/22 Update: OCA has been considering developing an online tool to make scheduling youth involvement in their hearings more convenient for the court, placement facilities, and DFPS caseworkers. OCA included questions regarding the scheduler tool in the survey to judges who attended the July 28-29, 2021 Children’s Commission Child Protection Court Convening. The survey results showed a lack of interest in having a scheduler tool now that judges have processes in place using Zoom for online hearings. Based on the survey results, the technology requirements to maintain a scheduler system, as well as verbal input received from the courts, OCA has determined that there is insufficient need to proceed with the previously planned scheduler tool.

At the May 2021 Commission meeting, funding for upgraded technology to support hybrid hearings in two CPCs was approved. Commission staff and OCA have identified Judge Andrea James, Child Protection Court #2, Second Judicial Administrative Region, and Judge Delia Gonzales, Dallas County Child Protection & Permanency Court as the two courts which will participate in the pilot program. Both Judge Gonzales and Judge James have provided overall positive feedback from their court’s CPC Hybrid Hearing Technology pilot, and other courts are expressing their interest in the equipment as well.

25. Strategy: Encourage the availability and use of the Office of Court Administration (OCA) Notice and Engagement tool.

Background: All parties involved in CPS cases continue to struggle with securing consistent and timely notice of scheduled hearings from DFPS. This issue includes foster placements and DFPS service provider facilities where the children/youth are in placement and results in many parties not being able to attend scheduled court hearings. The Notice and Engagement tool involves using non-confidential case data to provide email notice to users about upcoming hearings. OCA will market the Notice and Engagement tool and periodically re-issue announcements, survey users on the usefulness and effectiveness of the system, and monitor the system login and search information. Notices will be monitored to evaluate whether the correct hearing data are populating according to search criteria. Reports/data will be produced by OCA and provided to the Children’s Commission.

02/25/22 Update: The number of Notice and Engagement system users continues to increase, and 9,440 notifications have been sent regarding 3,945 hearings in FY2022. Since October 2021, an additional 64 users have registered bringing the total user number to 1,974. The numbers of users signing up for notification via text message has also increased. Since this notification option was added in 2018, 351 users have used the text feature.

OCA created an Application Programming Interface (API) that will allow Courts other than those using the Child Protection Court Case Management System (CPCMS) to upload their hearing data into the system. The goal of the API is to expand the hearing notification tool to all courts hearing child welfare cases in order to provide parties with up-to-date hearing information and to provide courts with an alternate means of notification free of charge.

To pilot the use of the Notice and Engagement tool for a court that is not a CPC, Tarrant County court data were successfully imported into CPCMS, and a court account was created for four individuals working with Tarrant County to enter data into CPCMS moving forward. OCA is continuing to collaborate with Tarrant County regarding bringing the system online.

Objective: Promote the value of mediation in child welfare cases, including opportunities to achieve timely permanency and increase efficiency in child welfare cases.

26. Strategy: Convene and support a Mediation Workgroup to establish an understanding and framework regarding availability and cost of mediation services and promote the training and support necessary to raise the quality and usefulness of mediation in child welfare cases.

Background: Mediation is used in CPS cases throughout Texas and can be an effective and financially prudent method of resolving cases. One benefit of mediation is that it can enhance participants’ sense that they were treated fairly. Studies show that an enhanced sense of fair treatment increases both acceptance and compliance with court decisions. Though the use of mediation to resolve CPS cases prior to trial has become widely accepted, the Children’s Commission is interested in exploring whether mediation is being underutilized in CPS cases because it often occurs too late in the case timeline for the benefits of increased compliance to be realized.

02/25/22 Update: The Mediation Workgroup developed a set of Virtual Mediation Tip Sheets for CPS mediators. The tip sheets are currently being reviewed and are expected to be finalized by Spring 2022. This year, the workgroup will focus on creating a Mediation Tool Kit for attorneys interested in mediating CPS cases and developing webinar content discussing the benefits of mediation in CPS cases. The next Mediation Workgroup meeting is scheduled on March 3, 2022.

Objective: Support innovative court practices for Texas courts hearing child welfare cases.

27. Strategy: Collaborate with and provide support for specialty courts, dockets, and programs.

Background: The Children’s Commission partners with or supports individual court efforts seeking to adopt specialized practices or programs. For example, in FY2019, the Children’s Commission provided seed money through OCA to employ an Associate Judge and Court Coordinator to assist in handling child abuse and neglect cases filed in Dallas County Family Courts to promote achieving permanency for children in the Permanent Managing Conservatorship of DFPS. Since March 2019, the Dallas County Child Protection & Permanency Court has assisted youth in the long-term care of DFPS. Participating courts include the 254th, 256th, 301st, and 303rd District Courts. The Children’s Commission is also exploring a judicially-led prevention effort in partnership with the Prevention and Early Intervention Division of DFPS.

02/25/22 Update: This strategy is developed on an ad hoc basis and there are no current updates during this reporting period.

GOAL IV (TRAINING)

Oversee and develop judicial and legal training efforts at all levels of practice that identify and promote best practices to improve outcomes and establish and maintain a well-informed judiciary and bar.

Objective: Provide high-quality and easily accessible training and resources that encourage judicial leadership both within the courtroom and in the broader child welfare community.

28. Strategy: Plan, fund, conduct, and evaluate judicial training through conferences, online content, and events.

Background: The Children’s Commission collaborates with the Texas Center for the Judiciary (TCJ) to design specialized judicial education and training opportunities for active, retired, and former Texas appellate, district, and county court at law judges, as well as associate judges and court personnel through its grant with TCJ. Each year TCJ plans at least one annual Child Welfare Judges Conference (CWJC) in partnership with the Children’s Commission. The Children’s Commission also provides partial funding for a half-day CPS Continuing Judicial Education (CJE) CIP track at TCJ’s annual Family Justice Conference. Planning and funding activities include designing curricula and conference agendas, determining the budget and number of attendees, participating in planning calls, vetting judicial scholarship applicants, surveying participants, and evaluating the process and event both internally and externally for future planning.

02/25/22 Update:

Child Welfare Judges Conference: The Child Welfare Judges Conference is the Commission’s largest annual judicial training and is hosted in partnership with TCJ. The 2021 CWJC was held virtually on October 25- 27, 2021 through Texas Center for the Judiciary’s online platform. This year’s conference included a Pre-Conference, per request of the Children’s Commission Curriculum Committee. The Pre-Conference focused on “Essentials of Child Welfare Cases.” Two judicial panels provided a “Legal Overview from Prevention Services through Final Orders and Beyond.” Legal nuts and bolts were addressed as well as the importance of being trauma-informed, viewing families through an equity lens, including youth and family voice, making individualized reasonable efforts determinations, and being data-informed. Other topics on the conference agenda included those designed with and presented by DFPS staff: a DFPS leadership panel, updates on FFPSA, QRTPs, and a presentation on statewide data. Regional Breakouts followed where judges in their DFPS regions were joined by DFPS Regional Directors, DFPS Regional Systems Improvement Specialists, and Single Source Continuum Contractor (SSCC) representatives in regions which have Community Based Care, as outlined in Strategy #35. The conference also included a panel on Learning from Older Youth and a panel on Addressing Kinship Issues which included perspectives from those with lived experiences. Overall, there were 40 speakers, and most presentations were interactive panels. The virtual conference was attended by 132 judicial participants. The CWJC content was archived on TCJ’s website and is available for review for free to judges who attended as well as additional judges who wish to view the curriculum. Recordings of these presentations will be available through TCJ’s website for a year following the date of the live virtual event.

Family Justice Conference: The annual Family Justice Conference was held on January 13-14, 2022. The Commission partners with TCJ to provide three speakers every year for an afternoon CIP breakout track on CPS-related CLE. This year, the Commission created presentations for each of the three topics that were requested by TCJ’s Curriculum Committee: Trauma Informed Court (presented by the Honorable

Rosie Alvarado, Judge of the 438th Civil District Court in Bexar County); CPS for the non-CPS Judge (presented by the Honorable Rob Hofmann, Judge of the 452nd District Court in Mason County); and a Child Welfare Legislative Update (presented by Children’s Commission Executive Director Jamie Bernstein). A total of 106 attendees participated across all three CIP sessions. The audience is primarily comprised of general jurisdiction judges, many of whom practice family law and hear child protection cases at least occasionally.

29. Strategy: Support specialized training for the Child Protection Court (CPC) program, judges, and support staff, including topics such as Reasonable Efforts.

Background: Child Protection Courts were created to assist trial courts in rural areas with managing their child abuse and neglect dockets. Like the child support court associate judges, these associate judges are appointed by their regional presiding judges and are OCA employees. At the discretion of the presiding judge, visiting judges are sometimes appointed to hear these cases instead of associate judges. The judges assigned to these CPC dockets hear child abuse and neglect cases exclusively. With this exclusive focus, children on CPC dockets can achieve permanency more quickly and the quality of placement decisions should be higher. There are currently 30 CPCs operating in Texas.

02/25/22 Update:

Reasonable Efforts Judicial Academy: On January 27-28, 2022 the Commission facilitated a virtual statewide judicial training in partnership with the national Capacity Building Center for Courts (CBCC) referred to as the Reasonable Efforts Judicial Academy. The curriculum contained federal and state black letter law on reasonable efforts as well as a presentation by included Senior Jurist in Residence Judge Rob Hofmann on “The Art of Making Reasonable Efforts Findings,” many opportunities for discussion, and four simulations where judges practiced making reasonable efforts rulings in different fact patterns representing various stages of a child welfare case. Commission staff presented or played roles in the simulations, along with several members of the Texas judiciary who were previously trained by the CBCC. Texas faculty members included Judge Rob Hofmann, Judge Piper McCraw, Judge Angela Graves-Harrington, and Children’s Commission staff. Twenty-two judges from across the state participated and of those, sixteen were CPC judges.

Objective: Provide high-quality and easily accessible training and resources, along with information for attorneys representing parents, children, and DFPS, as well as other advocates and stakeholders.

30. Strategy: Provide practical, experiential trial skills training that offers attorneys an opportunity to develop their skills in a small-group, low-stakes environment.

Background: Trial Skills Training (TST) is a hands-on training designed to improve the litigation skills of child welfare law attorneys in order to raise the caliber of legal services to children and families in child protection cases. Developed and initially spearheaded by Justice Michael Massengale, the TST is now led by JIR Judge Piper McCraw. Trial Skills Training is held once or twice a year and offers up to 20 MCLE hours, including ethics hours. Eleven TSTs have been hosted by the Children’s Commission since its inception in October 2013. Each TST program has a competitive application process and is limited to 21 less-experienced attorneys. It includes a fictional CPS fact pattern, with a complete case file covering all Texas-specific statutory hearings building up to final trial. TST provides parent, child, and state attorneys numerous litigation exercises in the CPS context and includes lectures and demonstrations from trained faculty comprised of seasoned attorneys and judges, followed by personal critiques and coaching. Caseworkers, Pediatricians, and Parent Therapists serve as live witnesses. Materials are updated and

new faculty is recruited and trained with each event. Extensive internal and external Continuous Quality Improvement (CQI) process and outcome evaluation is involved with each event.

02/25/22 Update: The Spring 2022 Trial Skills Training will occur on March 30, 2022, and April 6-7, 2022, via Zoom. Sixty-six attorneys applied to participate in the third interactive, virtual Trial Skills Training put on by the Commission and TST Faculty. Based on feedback received from the second virtual training, this virtual iteration will continue to include prerecorded material that participants will be asked to review in preparation for the live “Pretrial” and “Trial” dates and an optional practice session on Admitting Exhibits.

A jurisdictionally diverse group of 21 attorneys (7 parent attorneys, 7 child attorneys, and 7 attorneys representing DFPS) have been selected to participate in the Spring 2022 virtual training and will be provided with approximately 17 to 20 hours of CLE. Commission staff and TST faculty are working to update the TST fact pattern and case materials for the next training and hope to provide an additional Trial Skills Training in the Fall of 2022.

31. Strategy: Create and maintain online content that offers information and guidance on relevant child welfare law issues.

Background: In response to current circumstances and the need for virtual training, Commission staff are developing more regular webcasts to help educate child welfare stakeholders across the state.

02/25/22 Update: Commission staff developed the capacity to host a regular series of webcasts to help educate child welfare stakeholders across the state. These “in-house” webcasts focus on topics relevant to the legal community and are meant to supplement the approximately six hours a year described below which the Commission films in partnership with the CLE branch of the State Bar, TexasBarCLE.

On January 20, 2022, the Commission’s Judicial Workgroup on Commercial Sexual Exploitation of Children hosted a 1.5-hour webcast entitled “The Texas Response to the Commercial Sexual Exploitation of Children.” The webinar included tips for judges and attorneys on how to identify and work with children experiencing commercial sexual exploitation, a discussion about tools and resources available to these children, and a moderated discussion on how the respective actions of the Office of the Texas Governor, the Texas Department of Family and Protective Services, the Texas Alliance of Child and Family Services, and Texas CASA combine to form a comprehensive response to the commercial sexual exploitation of children in Texas. The archived video and all material related to the webinar, including the PowerPoint from the presentation, are available on the Training Committee’s [On-Demand MCLE](#) webpage. Topics for upcoming webcasts include a primer on statutory requirements and current issues in child welfare law, Qualified Residential Treatment Programs (QRTPs), youth voice in court, and appellate issues.

32. Strategy: Partner with the State Bar of Texas, DFPS, and other organizations to offer training to attorneys and advocates who serve children and families in child welfare cases throughout Texas.

Background: In partnership with the CLE branch of the State Bar of Texas, TexasBarCLE, the Children’s Commission produces MCLE courses on child welfare and related issues to provide training for court-appointed attorneys and attorneys representing DFPS. Typically, once each year the Children’s Commission works with TexasBarCLE to broadcast a day-long, 6 MCLE hours’ worth of training for attorneys who represent children, parents, and the state of Texas in child welfare proceedings. These live broadcasts are then archived in the TexasBarCLE’s Child Welfare Practice Area in their Online Classroom. Both the live and archived recordings of child welfare-related webinars are available at a reduced rate to attorneys representing children and parents, and there are scholarships available through

the Commission and through the Bar for attorneys who represent DFPS and need financial assistance to access this training. Additionally, the Children’s Commission partners with DFPS to provide high-quality training for attorneys representing DFPS, primarily through supporting their annual attorney training.

02/25/22 Update:

SBOT Annual Webcast Taping with TexasBarCLE: The Commission will coordinate with TexasBarCLE to produce up to seven hours of MCLE on child welfare topics this year. This will be the Commission’s first partnership with TexasBarCLE since September 2019. The first taping with TexasBarCLE will be a one-hour MCLE related to trauma training on February 28, 2022. Additionally, the Commission is in the early planning stages to provide updated “101” course offerings for court-appointed attorneys in TexasBarCLE’s Online Classroom. All prior years’ webcasts produced by the Commission in partnership with TexasBarCLE are archived and available as webinars for viewing at the same discounted rates provided for the live webcasts in the Child Welfare Practice Area of the TexasBarCLE’s Online Classroom.

Online Classroom: Through TexasBarCLE, the SBOT currently offers a number of online continuing legal education courses in the Child Welfare Practice Area related to representation of all parties on the CPS docket. A total of 17 webcasts have been archived in the CPS Practice Area of the TexasBarCLE’s Online Classroom, the majority of which were produced by the Children’s Commission in partnership with TexasBarCLE. The topics cover issues of interest to attorneys who work in the area of child welfare, including legal representation, statutory duties, and best practices. Some or all of the content of these webcasts and archived webinars may be considered in some jurisdictions to satisfy the educational requirements for court-appointed attorneys under Texas Family Code Sections 107.004 and 107.0131. All of the courses can be found at the following link by selecting the Child Welfare [Practice Area](#). In the Child Welfare Practice Area of their Online Classroom, TexasBarCLE provides discounts to court-appointed attorneys and scholarships to other viewers, while the Children’s Commission provides scholarships to attorneys representing DFPS.

DFPS Regional Attorney Training: DFPS is currently in the process of securing a venue for the annual DFPS Regional Attorney Training Conference. The Children’s Commission will provide funding in the form of a grant to support this training.

Objective: Ensure that judges and attorneys are knowledgeable and aware of educational opportunities in order to employ best practices in conducting hearings and in providing legal representation.

33. Strategy: Develop and distribute information to judges and attorneys that communicates best practices or changes in law, policy, or practice and informs judges and attorneys of trainings and other relevant events.

Background: Since May 2016, the Children’s Commission has maintained an electronic distribution list to help inform judges, legal practitioners, and child welfare stakeholders of training and scholarship opportunities and to relay pertinent child welfare-related information. The Children’s Commission regularly publishes resource letters for judges and/or attorneys about emerging, relevant, and changing policy, laws, practice, and training opportunities that are of interest to judges, attorneys, and stakeholders handling child welfare cases. All resource letters are posted on the Children’s Commission’s website. The Children’s Commission’s distribution list has grown to more than 4,100 Texas attorneys, judges, court staff, and stakeholders.

02/25/22 Update: Jurist in Residence (JIR) Letters and Judicial and Attorney Resource Letters (JARLs) issued between September 2021 and February 2022 include:

- [2/4/2022: New Resources: Attorney Ad Litem Coloring Book Now Available in Spanish and English; Eighth Edition of the "Aging Out" Guide](#)
- [2/2/2022: New Resource – Normalcy Matters: A Guide to Supporting Children & Youth in Texas Foster Care](#)
- [1/31/2022: "The Texas Response to the Commercial Sexual Exploitation of Children" Webinar Replay](#)
- [1/14/2022: NACC Publishes New Recommendations for Legal Representation of Children and Youth in Neglect and Abuse Proceedings](#)
- [1/12/2022: Announcing Scholarship Opportunities for Child Welfare Attorneys to ABA Center on Children and the Law's National Conferences](#)
- [1/11/2022: 2022 Human Trafficking Prevention Month](#)
- [1/4/2022: Spotlight on Child Sexual Exploitation in January](#)
- [12/10/2021: New Publication: Dual Status Task Force Final Report](#)
- [12/1/2021: Trial Skills Training Application Final Deadline is this Friday, December 3, 2021](#)
- [11/19/2021: Archive Sessions for 2021 Child Welfare Judges Conference & Save the Date for 2022](#)
- [11/18/2021: Spotlight on Adoption in November](#)
- [11/16/2021: Interactive Trial Skills Training Application Deadline Extended to Friday, December 3, 2021](#)
- [11/8/2021: November is Native American Heritage Month](#)
- [11/4/2021: Spring 2022 Trial Skills Training Applications Due Next Friday, November 12, 2021](#)
- [11/3/2021: NCJFCJ Survey of Judicial Officers regarding Families Impacted by Opioid Use Disorder and Substance Use Disorder](#)
- [11/1/2021: New Publications: Attorney Ad Litem Coloring Book and Updated Child Protection Law Bench Book](#)
- [10/29/2021: NSCS Summit on Virtual Child Welfare Hearings and Webinar on Multidisciplinary Legal Representation](#)
- [10/21/2021: Trial Skills Training Opportunity](#)
- [10/20/2021: Effective Now: Changes to Policy 2400 of the Child Protective Services Handbook](#)
- [10/13/2021: October is Domestic Violence Awareness Month](#)
- [10/6/2021: Jurist in Residence Letter, 2021 Child Welfare Judges Conference Update](#)
- [10/1/2021: Preserving Family Connections through Kinship Care](#)
- [9/16/2021: 2021 Texas ICWA Summit Replay and Materials Now Available](#)
- [9/10/2021: September is National Suicide Prevention Month](#)
- [9/1/2021: 87th Regular Legislative Session September 1st Effective Dates](#)

34. Strategy: Support attendance at state and national judicial and legal conferences and training events.

Background: The Children's Commission administers various judicial and attorney scholarship opportunities throughout the fiscal year, including but not limited to: (1) the biennial ABA Parent Attorney Conference and Children and the Law Conference; (2) the TexasBarCLE Advanced Family Law Child Abuse and Neglect One-Day Workshop; (3) the National Association of Counsel for Children Annual Conference; and (4) the National Council of Juvenile and Family Court Judges Annual Conference. For all scholarships, the Children's Commission determines scholarship criteria and deploys an application process that includes pre- and post-conference evaluations to identify or confirm the knowledge gained and new practices attendees plan to implement and/or a current practice attendees plan to change. The surveys also inquire about additional topics of interest to help inform planning for future conferences. All attorney applicants for Commission scholarships must currently represent DFPS or take appointments on a child welfare docket, be in good standing with the SBOT and with their primary judge, and commit to completing a post-event survey from the Commission. Judges with applicants from their jurisdiction are notified by the Children's Commission and asked to confirm that the applicant currently represents DFPS or takes appointments on their child welfare docket.

02/25/22 Update:

The Advanced Child Protection Law Conference: The Commission is working with TexasBarCLE to offer registration scholarships for qualified attorneys to attend the 4th Annual Advanced Child Protection Law Course, which will be hosted by TexasBarCLE and the Child Protection Law Section of the State Bar of Texas on March 24-25, 2022 in Houston, Texas and via webcast replay on April 26-27, 2022. The Commission allocated \$10,000 to cover registration costs to attend the live event or the webcast replay and hopes to announce the scholarship application soon.

Texas District and County Attorney Association Training (TDCAA): The Commission worked with the TDCAA Training Director and a planning committee to develop CLE content on child welfare issues and basic training for attorneys representing the Department. The content is recorded and is currently in the final editing stage. The videos will be made available on the TDCAA website by March 2022 and can be accessed by interested legal professionals for a registration fee. The Commission is working with TDCAA to offer registration scholarships to qualified attorneys representing DFPS to view this CLE content.

American Bar Association's 2022 National Conferences: The ABA's Center on Children and the Law will host the Access to Justice for Children and Families Conference on April 5-6, 2022 and the National Parent Representation Conference on April 7-8, 2022. Both conferences will be held in Tyson's Corner, Virginia. In January 2022, the Commission offered a limited number of reimbursement scholarships for qualified attorneys to attend. This scholarship was awarded to 10 attorneys in the form of reimbursement of up to \$1,250 for the conference registration fee and eligible conference-related travel expenses to attend one of the conferences. The Commission will distribute a post-event survey following the event to collect feedback from awardees.

Advanced Family Law One-Day Child Abuse and Neglect Workshop: This year's Child Abuse and Neglect One-Day Workshop is scheduled for August 10, 2022 in San Antonio, Texas. The Commission plans to support this statewide MCLE effort by partnering with the SBOT to provide registration scholarships to qualified attorneys from across the state. The Commission allocated \$10,000 to cover 100 qualified attorneys at \$100 each for registration to the live one-day workshop or any of the subsequent replays. The Commission hopes to announce the 2022 attorney scholarship application process by early summer.

National Association of Counsel for Children Annual Conference: The NACC's 45th National Child Welfare Law Conference will be held in a dual-format this year: in-person on August 22-24, 2022 in Baltimore, Maryland and virtually on September 21-23, 2022. The Commission allocated \$10,000 to provide scholarships to qualified Texas judges and attorneys to attend the annual conference. The Commission hopes to announce the 2022 scholarship application process for the NACC conference by early summer.

National Council of Juvenile and Family Court Judges 85th Annual Conference: The NCJFCJ's 85th Annual Conference is scheduled for July 17-20, 2022 in Reno, Nevada. The Commission has allocated \$30,000 to provide scholarships for qualified judges to attend the conference and plans to announce the scholarship application in April 2022.

GOAL V (DATA)

Operationalize data-driven decision-making through continuous quality improvement and an analysis of publicly available child welfare and court data to identify legal processes and practices that produce desired outcomes, as well as which practices need improvement.

Objective: Use child welfare, court, and other data to improve safety, permanency, and well-being outcomes for children and youth in foster care.

35. Strategy: At the annual judicial conference, partner with DFPS to provide a statewide data presentation as well as tailored data presentations on state, regional, and local challenges and opportunities and encourage data-driven systemic improvements and collaborative efforts.

Background: On an annual basis, DFPS and the Children's Commission partner to offer a statewide data plenary presentation to members of the judiciary at the Child Welfare Judges Conference, which is hosted by the Commission in partnership with the Texas Center for the Judiciary. The project also includes breakout sessions between judges and DFPS regional directors and regional systems improvement specialists to discuss region-specific data elements and permanency outcomes. This is achieved at the annual judicial conference through collaboration between the CIP and DFPS during the portion of the conference which focuses on educating the judiciary with data and updates from the Department. Due to the expansion of Community Based Care (CBC), Single Source Continuum Contractors responsible for case management and placement are also included in the regional breakout presentations with judges serving CBC catchment areas, beginning in 2020.

02/25/22 Update: The Statewide Data session at the 2021 Child Welfare Judges Conference shared Department data and updates on programs at the state level with judges and examined outcomes in the past year and how these data vary across the state. The data were presented by the DFPS Director of Data and Systems Improvement, and they focused on removals, experience in care (including children without placement), and achievement of permanency. Regional Breakouts followed this presentation. In the Regional Breakouts, judges by DFPS Region, DFPS Regional Directors, DFPS Regional Systems Improvement Specialists, and Single Source Continuum Contractor representatives in regions with Community Based Care met to examine and discuss regional data with an eye towards improving outcomes for children and families experiencing the child welfare system.

36. Strategy: Design and support a study to evaluate the efficacy of the Permanent Managing Conservatorship Court model.

Background: The Data Committee continues to facilitate meetings between TACFS, Casey Family Programs, and other stakeholders regarding the evaluation of Permanent Managing Conservatorship (PMC) Courts. A retrospective study on the work of the Houston PMC court has made significant progress since the last meeting. The appropriate data set has been identified and can be evaluated under pre-existing MOUs between DFPS and TACFS. The evaluation team is also working on initial steps toward the prospective study of both the Dallas and Houston PMC courts and is focusing on identifying sources for necessary qualitative data and the permissions and agreements necessary to acquire those data.

02/25/22 Update: There continues to be a delay in obtaining the retrospective data set regarding the Houston PMC Court. In light of that delay, the workgroup determined that the best course of action was

to continue to seek data from other relevant stakeholders and developed a plan to use surveys, focus groups, and interviews to obtain data regarding the PMC Court from the CASA programs in Harris and Dallas Counties and attorneys practicing in the PMC courts in both jurisdictions.

The surveys, focus groups, and interviews were conducted in October and early November, the coding and analysis of responses was completed in November and December, and the 2021 Final Report was released on December 29, 2021. The evaluation sought to answer how stakeholders define and conceptualize well-being among children and youth in PMC and how they perceive differences between the PMC courts and traditional courts.

Stakeholders were aligned on how they conceptualize well-being for children and youth in PMC and the PMC courts currently operating in Texas are using approaches and practices that target the dimensions of well-being articulated by stakeholders. The findings from the study suggest that PMC courts are a promising approach for improving well-being among the subset of children in youth in PMC.

The workgroup met on January 21, 2022, to review the final report, discuss its distribution, and plan for next steps for the prospective study. The next meeting of the workgroup will be in early March 2022.

Objective: Study the efficacy of virtual or hybrid court hearings in child welfare cases and develop training, tools, and resources designed to maintain the benefits of technology.

37. Strategy: Assess qualitative and quantitative data to identify best practices in conducting virtual or hybrid hearings and utilize this information to support improved legal and judicial practice.

Background: Texas will develop a virtual hearings study to identify best practices for virtual or hybrid hearings in child welfare cases. The study will include data collection and analysis to better understand the impact of remote proceedings in child welfare cases in Texas in response to COVID-19.

02/25/22 Update: In September 2021, the Office of Court Administration and the Children’s Commission executed a contract to support the hiring of a Senior Data Analyst. The Senior Data Analyst will conduct research and analysis about the benefits and drawbacks of virtual or hybrid hearings. The Senior Data Analyst will also participate in the Children’s Commission Data Committee and support court-related child welfare data projects. Jeff Cox, formerly a Senior Data Analyst with the Texas Alliance on Child and Family Services, accepted the Senior Data Analyst position and has joined the CPCMS Advisory Board and the Children’s Commission Data Committee.

Objective: Support robust data collection and appropriate information sharing in court case management.

38. Strategy: Partner with OCA to support the maintenance, enhancements, impact, and usability of the Child Protection Case Management System.

Background: CPCMS is a case management system which is unique to Child Protection Courts and has been in use since 2009. CPCMS is currently in maintenance mode. OCA staffs a CPCMS Advisory Council of CPC judges, OCA staff, and Children’s Commission staff to identify and discuss various enhancements and issues. User-generated problems and enhancements are routed through the Advisory Council, which also advises on data collection and reporting features of CPCMS. The Children’s Commission regularly collaborates with OCA on the status of CPCMS’ functioning, problems, and enhancements.

02/25/22 Update: The CPCMS Advisory Council met on February 11, 2022, to discuss planned updates and enhancements for CPCMS. Updates to the CPCMS system were released on October 12, 2021,

including added functionality to create a surrogate parent relationship for a child, allowing for multi-county docket reporting, and incorporating emergency order extensions into the active extension dashboard chart.

The council continued its review of CPCMS-required data fields to make sure the requirements reflect current best practices in court management and data tracking. The Advisory Council also discussed sixteen separate proposed enhancements for CPCMS. The council agreed on the need to revise the court ordered services case type to include the new statutory dismissal deadlines, extensions, and required review hearings. Other enhancements that were agreed to included adding a “child conference with judge” as a non-public hearing type and the ability to set a single hearing date to include multiple hearing types to reflect several motions being heard at a single hearing. The council also agreed on the need to define “Virtual,” “Hybrid,” and “In-Person” hearing sub-types and make them available for all hearings and amend the way hearing attendance data are tracked to improve data accuracy.

Due to time constraints, other proposed enhancements were not discussed but the Advisory Council will address them over email in advance of the next council meeting. The next meeting of the Advisory Council will be in the third quarter of FY2022.

39. Strategy: Encourage efficiency in data collection and information sharing, including integrating the DFPS IMPACT system and CPCMS, expanding CPCMS to non-Child Protection Courts, and working with other jurisdictions that do not utilize CPCMS.

Background: The Data Committee has been facilitating meetings between OCA, DFPS, and Data Committee members to discuss data sharing and integration between OCA’s CPCMS system and DFPS’ IMPACT system. The goal of integration is reducing errors and increasing data accuracy while reducing court staff workloads. OCA has also created an Application Programming Interface (API) that will allow Courts other than Child Protection Courts to upload their hearing data into the system and utilize the data collection and case management features of CPCMS.

02/25/22 Update: On June 25, 2021, OCA, DFPS, and Data Committee members formed a workgroup to discuss a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) to share a sample data set to test the data matching criteria to determine whether data sharing and integration between the CPCMS and IMPACT systems can be successful. The MOU has been reviewed by OCA and DFPS legal staff, but the project is on hold as DFPS is undergoing a comprehensive overhaul of its data sharing policy and process and all data requests have been paused until the overhaul is complete.

The overhaul includes creating a new web-based self-managed process for requesting data for research, policy, or custom analysis requests. DFPS is also developing an Institutional Review Board process to streamline the submission of research applications as well as ensure the reviews follow federal regulatory protocols for human subjects. DFPS estimates the overhaul will be complete in Spring 2022 and the CPCMS and IMPACT workgroup will resume the project at that time.

OCA and Commission staff, in partnership with judges in Tarrant County, are exploring the use of CPCMS for courts outside of the statutory Child Protection Courts. Tarrant County data have been converted and loaded into CPCMS and OCA and Tarrant County are in conversations about bringing the system online.

Commission and OCA staff, including Senior Data Analyst Jeff Cox, have also begun a project of analyzing trends in referrals, investigations, and removals prior to and after the changes to the Texas Family Code implemented by the 87th Texas Legislative Session.

INSERT - TAB 4

**Children's Commission
Financial Report**

FY 2022 BUDGET

FY 2021 Carry Forward	\$	1,695,586
FY 2022 Federal Distribution	\$	1,820,871
FY 2022 Available Funds	\$	3,516,457

FY 2022 OBLIGATIONS

	Budget	Expenses To-date	Outstanding Obligations
Operating	\$ 1,216,406	\$ 251,825	\$ 964,581
Commission Projects	\$ 208,200	\$ -	\$ 208,200
<i>Systems Improvement</i>	\$ 95,650	\$ 6,024	\$ 89,626
<i>Legal Practice and Process</i>	\$ 81,250	\$ 15,967	\$ 65,283
<i>Training</i>	\$ 30,050	\$ 2,148	\$ 27,902
<i>Data</i>	\$ 1,250	\$ -	\$ 1,250
Scholarships	\$ 82,000	\$ -	\$ 82,000
Grants	\$ 800,600	\$ 56,796	\$ 743,804
<i>DFPS - Regional Attorney Training</i>	\$ 13,000	\$ -	\$ 13,000
<i>OCA - CIP Technology Project</i>	\$ 170,276	\$ 13,066	\$ 157,210
<i>OCA - CPC Visiting Judge</i>	\$ 21,110	\$ 2,888	\$ 18,222
<i>OCA - Data Analyst</i>	\$ 100,000	\$ -	\$ 100,000
<i>OCA - Virtual Court Equipment Update</i>	\$ 25,000	\$ -	\$ 25,000
<i>TACFS - Data & Trauma Informed Court Practices</i>	\$ 98,468	\$ -	\$ 98,468
<i>Texas CASA - Child Welfare Legal Process</i>	\$ 25,265	\$ 18,312	\$ 6,953
<i>TCJ - Family Justice, Child Welfare Judges Conference</i>	\$ 135,418	\$ 22,531	\$ 112,887
<i>TLSC - Family Helpline</i>	\$ 160,000	\$ -	\$ 160,000
<i>TNOYS - Young Adult Leadership Council</i>	\$ 52,064	\$ -	\$ 52,064
	\$ 2,307,206	\$ 308,621	\$ 1,998,585

CURRENT FINANCIAL STATUS

Federal Fund Balance	\$	3,516,457
FY 2022 Outstanding Obligations	\$	1,998,585
Estimated Carry Forward FY 2023	\$	1,517,872

February 16, 2022

INSERT - TAB 5

Children's Commission Meeting

Collaborative Council Updates

February 25, 2022

- Texas RioGrande Legal Aid Foster Youth Justice Project
- Texas Council on Family Violence

**Collaborative Council Report
Texas Foster Youth Justice Project
Children’s Commission February 25, 2022**

A Guide for Those “Aging Out” of Foster Care in Texas

The Texas Foster Youth Justice Project published its 8th edition of *A Guide for Those “Aging Out” of Foster Care in Texas*. The Guide is written for youth in the Texas foster care system to use as a resource when transitioning from care. Topics include foster youth benefits, employment, housing, health insurance and Medicaid benefits, education, and identification documents. Online copies are available at the Texas Foster Youth Justice Project’s website, TexasFosterYouth.org and free, printed copies of the Guide are also available for distribution to youth. To order printed copies, email info@texasfosteryouth.org or click [here](#). Thank you to the Commission for funding the printing of the Guides!

Pandemic Relief Funds for Current and Aged Out Foster Youth

The Texas Department of Family and Protective Services has access to millions of dollars of extra pandemic relief funds to assist current and aged foster youth ages 14-20 through August 31, 2022. These funds came from the Supporting Foster Youth and Families Through the Pandemic law, Division X of the mammoth Consolidated Appropriations Act FY 2021. The agency reserved a portion of these funds for Fiscal Year 2022.

The Texas Foster Youth Justice Project prepared an [informational flyer](#) for youth and young adults to highlight the availability of the funds and the importance of asking their Preparation for Adult Living (PAL) worker or transition support services provider for help with their financial needs. The flyer is a great resource for those that work with foster youth to help identify needs that DFPS normally would not be able to assist with due to limited funds.

These funds provide a remarkable opportunity to provide meaningful financial assistance to vulnerable young adults and youth. However, DFPS has provided limited information about the availability of the funds or that more substantive assistance than normal is available. Advocates should be aware that there is no actual application for the additional funds; the youth or young adults must simply notify their Preparation for Adult Living (PAL) worker or transition support services provider about the specific financial need they have. The funds are not a cash payout to youth or young adults; they are used for direct payments to the businesses or service providers. In addition, funds are available for those currently in foster care, including extended foster care/supervised independent living, as well as those who have aged out of foster care.

If youth reach out for help with specific financial needs and are told they cannot receive help or are not getting responses to their request, they can contact the Texas Foster Youth Justice Project for legal assistance. For more information about the funds or for youth to seek free legal assistance, contact the Texas Foster Youth Justice Project at 877-313-3688 or info@TexasFosterYouth.org.

The Texas Foster Youth Justice Project provides free legal services for current and former foster youth throughout Texas. For more information, please visit the Texas Foster Youth Justice Project website TexasFosterYouth.org.

the 1990s, the number of people in the world who are illiterate has increased from 500 million to 600 million.

It is not surprising that the illiterate population has increased in the last decade. The reason is that the population of the world is increasing rapidly. The population of the world in 1990 was 5.3 billion. In 2000, it was 6 billion. In 2010, it will be 6.5 billion. In 2020, it will be 7 billion. In 2030, it will be 7.5 billion. In 2040, it will be 8 billion. In 2050, it will be 8.5 billion. In 2060, it will be 9 billion. In 2070, it will be 9.5 billion. In 2080, it will be 10 billion. In 2090, it will be 10.5 billion. In 2100, it will be 11 billion.

The illiterate population of the world in 1990 was 500 million. In 2000, it was 600 million. In 2010, it will be 700 million. In 2020, it will be 800 million. In 2030, it will be 900 million. In 2040, it will be 1 billion. In 2050, it will be 1.1 billion. In 2060, it will be 1.2 billion. In 2070, it will be 1.3 billion. In 2080, it will be 1.4 billion. In 2090, it will be 1.5 billion. In 2100, it will be 1.6 billion.

The illiterate population of the world in 1990 was 500 million. In 2000, it was 600 million. In 2010, it will be 700 million. In 2020, it will be 800 million. In 2030, it will be 900 million. In 2040, it will be 1 billion. In 2050, it will be 1.1 billion. In 2060, it will be 1.2 billion. In 2070, it will be 1.3 billion. In 2080, it will be 1.4 billion. In 2090, it will be 1.5 billion. In 2100, it will be 1.6 billion.

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the 1990s, the number of people in the world who are living in poverty has increased from 1.1 billion to 1.5 billion (World Bank 2000).

There are many reasons for the increase in poverty. One of the main reasons is the rapid population growth in the developing countries. The population of the world is expected to reach 8 billion by the year 2025 (United Nations 2000). This rapid population growth is putting a heavy burden on the natural resources of the developing countries. The demand for food, water, and energy is increasing, and the natural resources are being depleted. This is leading to a decline in the standard of living and an increase in poverty.

Another reason for the increase in poverty is the rapid technological change in the developed countries. The developed countries are becoming more and more dependent on technology. This is leading to a decline in the demand for low-skilled labor in the developed countries. This is leading to a decline in the standard of living and an increase in poverty in the developed countries.

There are many other reasons for the increase in poverty. One of the main reasons is the rapid technological change in the developed countries. The developed countries are becoming more and more dependent on technology. This is leading to a decline in the demand for low-skilled labor in the developed countries. This is leading to a decline in the standard of living and an increase in poverty in the developed countries.

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- In addition to being Black History Month, February is also Teen Dating Violence Awareness Month. This month or any month, please feel free to reach out to TCFV or [your local FV program](#) to find resources on how to talk to youth and young adults about healthy relationships of all kinds.
- This article was recently published by our colleagues at UTMB related to [The Impact of Domestic Violence Transitional Housing on Parents and Children](#). Housing and homelessness are frequent issues facing domestic violence (DV) survivors and their children. Several DV programs provide transitional housing (DVTH) to address the housing needs of DV survivors and their children. Despite wide use, little is known about the impact of DVTH, especially on child and parenting related needs and outcomes. Overarching themes of this analysis include: (1) DVTH helps to strengthen the parent–child relationship through a focus on family connection and health; (2). Transitional housing provides an opportunity for family stability via housing, material, and economic stability; (3). Time at DVTH allows family to access a diverse range of trauma-informed resources and social support to meet family goals. *One particularly destabilizing impact of DV for parents and children is housing instability and homelessness which further reduces safety and destabilizes families, independent of DV. Many DV survivors facing housing insecurity have minor children, increasing family vulnerability when trying to leave a violent relationship.*
- As we look to FY23 and our second round of RFP’s for our CJD-funded incubator sites, we are interested in making a broader outreach to bring in more interest from organizations and agencies across the state who provide [any kind of service](#) to families in historically oppressed and marginalized communities. If you have thoughts or ideas on any aspect of this outreach, please let me know! (Seriously. ANY ideas.) =)

- Barbra Ann Grimmer

