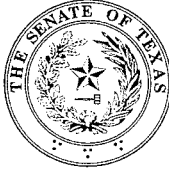


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84th Legislature

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November 7, 2016

The Honorable Jane Nelson
Chair, Senate Finance Committee
P.O. Box 12068
Austin, TX 78711

Dear Chair Nelson,

First, we want to thank you for your leadership on this important issue and for appointing the Senate Finance Committee Workgroup on Child Protection to further study and research the proposal submitted by Commissioner Whitman to address critical funding needs for the remainder of Fiscal Year 2017. It is evident from the hearing on October 26th that every member of the Senate Finance Committee has a strong desire to ensure children at the highest risk of abuse and neglect are seen immediately to guarantee their safety. Since you established and entrusted the Senate Finance Committee Workgroup on Child Protection to examine and research Commissioner Whitman's proposal, we have been working diligently to guarantee that our recommendations address the immediate critical needs of Child Protective Services (CPS), but also make long-term changes to improve morale and retention of the employees who have the incredibly difficult task of protecting the most vulnerable children in our state.

The 84th Legislature prioritized the Department of Family and Protective Services (DFPS), increasing the agency's budget by nearly \$400 million. Much of this increased funding was provided to support CPS Transformation initiatives intended to improve child safety, permanency and well-being; alleviate unnecessary burdens on caseworkers while improving employee retention and turnover; and strengthen training and supervision at CPS. The Stephen Group's 2014 operational review of DFPS found that caseworkers spend just 26 percent of their time directly interacting with children and families. The 84th Legislature passed comprehensive legislation to remove bureaucratic hurdles and duplication of effort so that caseworkers can spend their time protecting children and strengthening families, rather than working on unnecessary administrative tasks and paperwork. While many CPS Transformation initiatives have been implemented by the agency, the work is not complete. This was taken into consideration by the Workgroup when examining Commissioner Whitman's proposal, and should also be taken into consideration during the 85th Legislative Session to ensure new reforms and funding align with and support CPS Transformation.



The Workgroup recommends a plan that would total approximately \$67.6 General Revenue and \$75.3 million All Funds, based on estimates from the agency, for the remainder of Fiscal Year 2017, ending on August 31, 2017. This funding would support the following measures to address critical funding needs related to enhancing child protection:

Compensation

Although insufficient compensation is not the only contributor to CPS's consistently high level of caseworker turnover, salary is increasingly cited by caseworkers leaving the agency as the primary reason for their departure. Turnover is exceptionally high for front-line caseworkers and Special Investigators. In Fiscal Year 2016, turnover was 32.9 percent for Investigative caseworkers, 25 percent for Family Based Safety Services caseworkers, 22.6 percent for Conservatorship caseworkers, and 19.2 percent for Special Investigators.

To address these unacceptable levels of turnover, the Workgroup believes that there should be a significant salary increase to adequately compensate caseworkers for their work, improve morale, demonstrate the Legislature's appreciation of these front-line workers, and improve employee retention. Front-line caseworkers in Investigations, Conservatorship, and Family Based Safety Services should receive a \$12,000 annual increase as follows: a base increase of \$4,000 upon hire, a \$4,000 increase after six months of employment, and a final \$4,000 increase after one year of employment. Existing caseworkers employed for less than six months should receive a \$6,000 increase after six months of service and an additional \$6,000 increase after a year of service. Caseworkers employed by CPS for at least six months but less than one year should receive a \$6,000 increase effective December 1, 2016 and an additional \$6,000 increase after one year of employment. Those employed for at least a year should receive the annual \$12,000 increase (\$1,000 per month) on December 1, 2016, as specified in Commissioner Whitman's proposal. This tiered approach will provide a base increase, but will also reward longevity and invest resources in those who have completed training and are ready to carry a full caseload. The Workgroup took into consideration the fact that caseworkers cannot carry a full caseload until completion of training, which is six months after their start date.

Special Investigators who are also on the front line investigating child abuse and neglect, and ensuring face-to-face visits for the highest risk children in the state should receive a 20 percent increase in annual salary, effective upon hire. Existing Special Investigators should receive the annual 20 percent increase effective December 1, 2016.

The Workgroup also recommends that, effective December 1, 2016, supervisors managing Investigation, Conservatorship, and Family Based Safety Services caseworkers receive a 20 percent annual salary increase, Program Directors receive a 15 percent annual increase, and Program Administrators receive a 10 percent annual increase. These increases are recommended to address the issue of salary compression at CPS, whereby high-performing caseworkers and supervisors are disincentivized from seeking promotions to managerial positions because take home pay is often lower than what they received as a caseworker. All other caseworkers and supervisors including Foster and Adopt, Kinship, I See You, and Preparation for Adult Living, should receive a 10 percent increase to adequately compensate them for their work, and to prevent a large salary disparity between caseworkers and supervisors at CPS. The Workgroup

does not recommend a salary increase at this time for Regional Directors or Deputy Regional Directors.

As a condition of this funding, DFPS should report monthly to the Senate Finance Committee on retention rates by stage of service and job description. DFPS should also conduct exit surveys of staff subject to salary increases who leave the agency beginning on January 1, 2017 to determine the reason for leaving and what impact salary increases had on job satisfaction.

Special Investigators and Investigative Caseworkers

With the assistance of law enforcement, DFPS has been able to drastically reduce the backlog of children at the highest risk of maltreatment (Priority 1, or P1) who have not yet been seen by a caseworker or Special Investigator. The contributions of the Department of Public Safety (DPS) and other law enforcement officials are greatly appreciated, and DFPS should continue to work at the regional level to build ongoing relationships with law enforcement to assist in CPS Investigations as needed. However, a more sustainable solution is necessary to ensure that all new allegations, particularly P1 cases, are seen in a timely manner as required by law. Therefore, the Workgroup recommends the agency hire an additional 50 Special Investigators and 7.5 Full Time Equivalent (FTE) positions to support these Investigators, and 50 additional Investigative Caseworkers and 28.5 FTEs to support these caseworkers.

With the addition of these FTE's, the Workgroup recommends that DFPS report to the Senate Finance Committee weekly until June 1, 2017 on the timeliness of P1 and Priority 2 (P2) face-to-face contacts by region. DFPS should also report to the Committee weekly on the number of P1 intakes, by region, without face-to-face contact for over 24 hours, over 48 hours, and over 96 hours. Further, the Workgroup recommends specific benchmarks to ensure initial contact with these children is improved. These include:

- By March 1, 2017, all regions will see 90 percent of children in P1 cases within 24 hours.
- By June 1, 2017, all regions will see 95 percent of children in P1 cases within 24 hours.

The Workgroup recommends that further consideration of additional FTEs be addressed once the agency demonstrates improvement in retention due to both salary increases and additional FTE's funded based on the Workgroup's recommendations. Salary increases should improve retention, which will increase the number of caseworkers that are fully case assignable, alleviating high workloads of tenured caseworkers. It should also be noted that although there are 50 caseworker vacancies in Regions 3 (Dallas), 6 (Houston) and 7 (Austin), there are 439 caseworkers in these regions who are in training and are therefore not fully case-assignable. Turnover is highest during the first 6 months of employment--salary increases will induce more of these caseworkers in training to join the ranks of fully case assignable workers, alleviating high workloads.

Supervision

Based on a preliminary evaluation by the University of Texas LBJ School of Public Affairs, outcomes associated with the new competency-based caseworker training known as CPS Professional Development (CPD), are positive. These preliminary results show that workers trained under the CPD model have a better understanding of what their jobs entail, feel better prepared to handle their job responsibilities, and are less likely to consider leaving the agency in

the near future than caseworkers trained under the old basic skills training program. New supervisor training, which DFPS will roll out on December 1, 2016, will mirror the CPD caseworker training. The Workgroup supports DFPS rolling out its new Supervisor Training on December 1st and their plan to hold a two day leadership training by February 1, 2017 for Program Directors, Program Administrators, Service Program Administrators, Regional Operations Support Administrators, and Regional Directors. Supervision is a focus of CPS Transformation, and must continue to be a focus at DFPS in order to address one of the root causes of high caseworker turnover. Therefore, the Workgroup recommends setting the following benchmark for supervisor training:

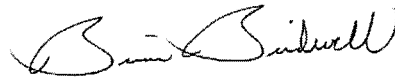
- By June 1, 2017, new supervisor training of all supervisors (current and new) should be completed statewide.

Improving workforce retention and ensuring timely investigations of child abuse and neglect allegations demand immediate and drastic measures, as proposed in the above recommendations. However, the Workgroup understands that there is another crisis in the CPS system- a foster care capacity crisis. It is unacceptable for children removed from their homes to be sleeping in offices and hotel rooms, or staying past medical necessity in psychiatric and medical hospitals as an alternative to safe, therapeutic, appropriate foster placements. The Workgroup looks forward to reviewing the agency's forthcoming critical needs request related to foster care capacity. Additionally, the Workgroup plans to begin the task of carefully reviewing the DFPS Legislative Appropriations Request for the Fiscal Years 2018-19 biennium in its entirety in the near future, as you directed at the Senate Finance Committee hearing on October 26th. The Workgroup appreciates your leadership on this most important issue, and shares your desire to do whatever is necessary to adequately protect the children of Texas.

Sincerely,



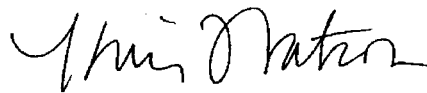
Senator Charles Schwertner, Workgroup Chair



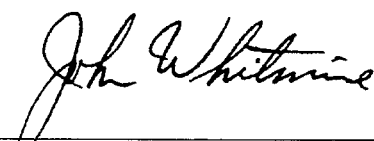
Senator Brian Birdwell



Senator Lois Kolkhorst



Senator Kirk Watson



Senator John Whitmire