

April 13, 2004
Committee

Senate Health and Human Services
78th Legislature

Adoption Subsidies and Foster Families

I am Scott McCown and I am testifying on behalf of the Center for Public Policy Priorities. The center has long been concerned about child well-being, and is the home of the Texas KIDS COUNT Project. In addition to my work at the center, I have significant field experience. For fourteen years I heard child abuse cases as a district judge. I heard some 2,000 cases concerning some 4,000 children. Though I have retired as a judge, I remain a member of the National Council of Juvenile and Family Court Judges and a member of the Texas Supreme Court Task Force on Foster Care.

Since the passage by Congress of the Adoption and Safe Families Act of 1997 (ASFA), Texas has significantly increased the number of adoptions. According to a national study conducted by *Fostering Results* of the Children and Family Research Center at the School of Social Work at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, Texas doubled its adoption performance by 1999 with a 163% increase over its baseline average.

While Texas has done well, continuing to improve will be difficult for the following reasons:

Before the big push to implement ASFA, Texas had a backlog of children from which to draw for placements. After the big push, many hard-to-place children remained, and this pool of hard-to-place children will continue to grow. We must address the problem of hard-to-place children.

Before the big push to implement ASFA, Texas also had an inventory of foster homes ready and willing to adopt. After the big push, many of those foster homes had adopted and were therefore closed to more children. About two-thirds of all adoptions are by a foster family. We must therefore constantly recruit new foster parents to replace those lost to adoption. Additional funds need to be spent on community outreach for adoptive parents.

Increasing the amount of the adoption subsidy is also part of the solution. Keeping the subsidy low to save dollars is not cost effective because the state must continue to pay for foster care. As long as the amount of the subsidy is no more than the amount of the foster care subsidy, the state at least breaks even. The department's study of a tiered subsidy deserves careful consideration.

In addition to increasing the amount of individual subsidies, the state must annually increase the total amount budgeted for subsidies. As adoptions are consummated, subsidy dollars are then committed until the child turns eighteen. To consummate additional adoptions, we need additional subsidy

dollars. Of course, as children turn eighteen, the dollars supporting their adoption become available to support a new adoption, but the number of children turning eighteen in any year will always be much smaller than the growing number of children awaiting placement.

As the chart below shows, the state's performance with regard to adoptions is improving in terms of raw numbers, but the number of adoptions as a percent of the children awaiting placement is beginning to decline. (For example: the number of consummated adoptions in 2000 divided by number of children awaiting placement at end of 1999 yields 86%.)

	Consummated adoptions	Children awaiting placement at end of fiscal year	Consummated adoptions as a percent of children awaiting placement at the end of the previous fiscal year
1992	541		
1993	657		
1994	747		
1995	804		
1996	746		
1997	1,091		
1998	1,548		
1999	2,054	2,402	
2000	2,063	2,933	86%
2001	2,261	3,183	77%
2002	2,248	3,473	71%
2003	2,444	3,766	70%

Only with significant legislative commitment to funding can Texas maintain its impressive adoption performance.

Respectfully submitted,

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