



Center for Public Policy Priorities

**Statement of F. Scott McCown
Director of the Center for Public Policy Priorities
Regarding Child Protective Services Legislation**

To answer how child protection fared this session, one must study both the final appropriations bills and Senate Bill 6.

The good news is that the appropriations bills will give CPS more money to help children and families, but the bad news is that CPS will continue to struggle. CPS will only get about a 12% increase in funding (combined state and federal). This increase will help win some battles, but is not enough to turn the tide in the war against child abuse and neglect.

To put Texas spending in a national context, we will probably still rank below the Southern-states average spending per child for child protection. Our caseloads will remain among the highest in the nation. Under the budget, investigative caseloads are supposed to drop from the mid-70s to the mid-40s, but they need to be in the mid-20s to provide an acceptable level of safety. National best practice standards call for investigative caseloads between 12 and 15 per caseworker.

Assessing Senate Bill 6 is more difficult than assessing the budget. Chairman Nelson and Chairman Hupp, along with Chairman Uresti, worked hard on CPS reform, and we appreciate their work. There are some significant new provisions in SB 6, even a few that we suggested, such as providing indigent parents lawyers from the beginning of the case, which will strengthen our system.

But the big issue is privatization. The Legislature has decided to aggressively pursue outsourcing—not just the care of children, but decision making about children’s lives. Given the resources in the budget, and the structure of the system in Senate Bill 6, the state will have little oversight of its private contractors. We know all too well what happens when the state doesn’t aggressively oversee contracts. Only here, we won’t be reading about cost overruns on a highway, but about damage to children and families.

An important floor amendment, offered by Representatives Naishtat and Luna, joined by Representatives Hupp and Truitt, ensures that privatization will be more slowly implemented and more carefully evaluated. We too will be monitoring and evaluating the results. If privatization works better for children and families, we will applaud. If it doesn’t, we will advocate a change in direction by the 80th Legislature.

No one should think the job is done on child protection. It took a decade to get in the hole we are in today, and at this pace, it will take a decade to get out.

F. Scott McCown is the Director of the Center for Public Policy Priorities, the home of Texas KIDS COUNT. Before joining CPPP, he was a state district judge and heard some 2,000 CPS cases involving some 4,000 children.