

Senate Bill 1, General Appropriations Bill: PRS Budget

I am F. Scott McCown, Executive Director of the Center for Public Policy Priorities, a non-partisan, non-profit policy research organization concerned about low- and moderate-income Texans. Child welfare is an important issue for the center; it has also long been a major interest of mine. As a state district judge, I heard over 2,000 child abuse cases concerning more than 4,000 children. I continue to serve as a member of the National Council of Juvenile and Family Court Judges and the Texas Supreme Court Task Force on Foster Care.

Governor Bush championed abused children. Everything he did for children, however, the 78th Legislature under Governor Perry will undo unless you adequately fund Child Protective Services.

Governor Bush created the Committee to Promote Adoption, which concluded that the state was neglecting children in foster care instead of moving them to permanent homes. In response, the 75th Legislature required the courts and CPS to move foster children back to their own homes or forward to adoptive homes within a year.

Governor Bush did not stop there. After studying the CPS budget, he convinced the 76th Legislature to increase funding by \$204 million. This included money for 380 more front-line caseworkers (though it is important to know that for the most part this merely restored workers lost to budget cuts in 1995). The increased funding also included money for a 7% foster care rate increase and prevention programs.

These steps made a difference in the safety of children. With more staff, CPS was better able to investigate allegations of abuse. In 1998, before the increased funding, CPS removed

6,917 abused children. In 2002, with the increased funding, CPS removed 11,309 abused children, more than a 60% increase in four years. Incredibly, the proposed budget cuts 245 CPS workers, taking CPS back to staffing levels of 1994, a decade ago.

Governor Bush also increased money for services to families, such as substance abuse treatment, so CPS could leave children safely home with services or return children safely home after services. The proposed budget cuts services by millions. CPS admits that by reducing services more children will have to be removed from their home and fewer children will be able to return home.

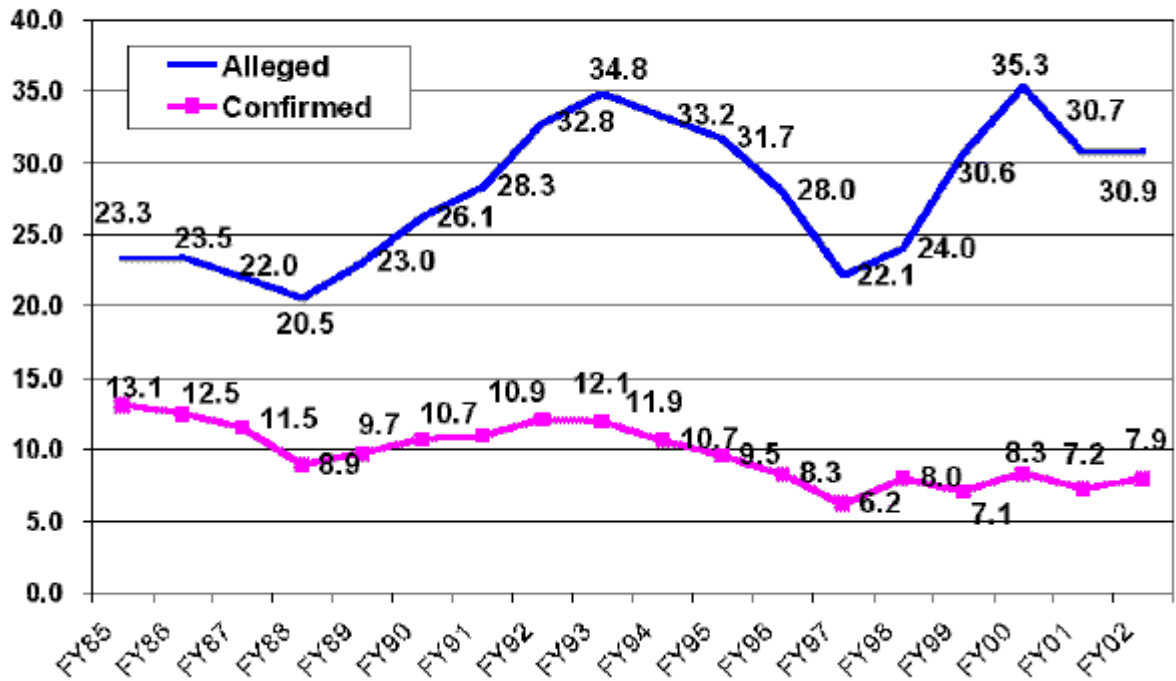
Consequently, CPS will need more homes; yet, the proposed budget cuts foster care and adoption subsidies by an astounding 25% from what is needed for FY 2004, back to the amount paid a decade ago, a loss to foster parents and treatment centers of over \$100 million a year in state and federal funds. CPS concedes that this cut will force some foster homes and treatment centers to close. CPS already has too few safe places for children, and with these cuts will soon have even fewer. By cutting adoption subsidies, CPS admits it will complete fewer adoptions. Currently, over 3,700 children are free for adoption and awaiting a family. Without an adequate adoption subsidy, many families just cannot consider parenting these children, many of whom have special needs or a part of a sibling group.

Governor Bush increased money for child abuse prevention. Under the proposed budget, of the state's seventeen prevention programs, the state will fund only four, three reduced by 16% and one paid for with federal funds. In essence, under the proposed budget, the state is abandoning its efforts to prevent child abuse.

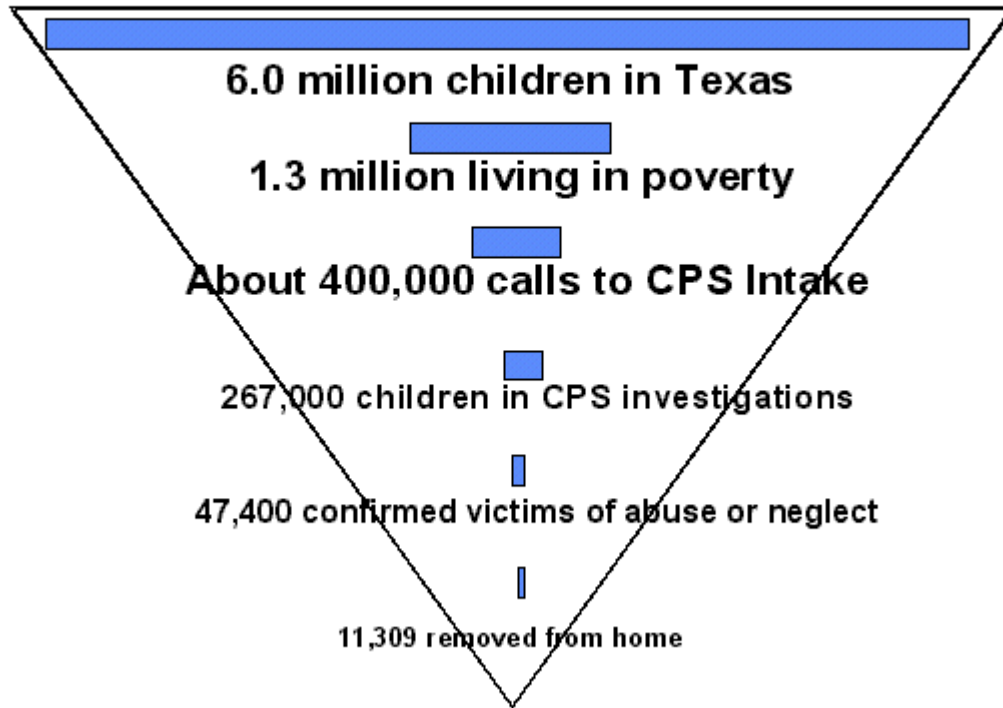
The proposed budget cuts are in the context of a state that already does shockingly little to protect children. Texas ranks 48th in the number of children per 10,000 general population to whom we provide foster care. (CQ State Fact Finder 2003.) If you adopt this budget, you will be haunted for the next several years every time you pick up a paper and read about an abused

child. I urge you to exempt CPS from cuts and if possible provide additional funds to keep up with population and foster care growth.

ABUSED CHILDREN PER 1,000 OF CHILD POPULATION



**The Texas Child Protection Funnel FY 2002
CPS Data**



FY 1998, FY 1999, and FY 2000 Foster Care: Entries, Exits, and In Care on the Last Day

State	Entering Foster Care this Year			Exiting Care during the Year			In Care on Last Day of Year		
	FY 1998	FY 1999	FY 2000	FY 1998	FY 1999	FY 2000	FY 1998	FY 1999	FY 2000
California	52,997	43,587	45,685	50,049	39,156	50,112	112,767	117,937	112,807
Texas	7,025	8,938	9,939	7,665	8,200	8,283	15,182	16,326	18,236
New York	19,749	18,172	16,601	20,324	20,497	20,243	53,555	51,159	47,208
Florida	13,980	21,118	18,765	7,934	8,117	15,507	26,320	34,292	35,656
Illinois	9,229	7,856	6,643	12,627	14,112	11,505	48,737	40,270	33,125
Michigan	10,220	10,929	10,707	5,207	6,740	7,802	18,583	20,300	20,034

U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Admin. On Children and Families Data