



Legislative Priorities for the 81st Legislative Session

The participants in the Roundtable represent organizations with varying perspectives on juvenile justice. However, several shared priorities serve as the basis for the Roundtable's collective work. Priorities for juvenile justice reform in the 81st Texas Legislative Session are to:

- 1. Move towards small, regionalized county and state juvenile justice facilities that promote rehabilitation in a non-violent environment.**
 - Use diversion programs to keep all but the most serious juvenile offenders out of secure facilities.
 - Allow TYC to use the bond money approved in 2007 flexibly to meet the needs of youth using small, decentralized facilities that keep youth close to their families.
 - Provide a continuum of services to youth in state custody.
 - Ensure that community-based service providers are held to the same standard of care as the public sector and that contracted services are monitored robustly.
 - Ensure that all juvenile justice practices in Texas are best practices.
 - Assure that juvenile justice facilities are free from abuse and neglect.

- 2. Improve juvenile justice interventions at the county and state level by using wrap-around services and community-based treatments that have a positive effect on youth both before and after system involvement.**
 - Probation practices should be child-centered, family-focused, and research-based.
 - Parole services should be child-centered, family-focused, and research-based.
 - All services for youth on probation, in facilities, on parole, and when exiting the system should be culturally competent.

- 3. Decrease public school practices that funnel students into the juvenile justice system.**
 - Use research-based practices, like School-Wide Positive Behavioral Support, to reduce disciplinary referrals and keep schools safe.
 - Require the Texas Education Agency to monitor and enforce standards for Disciplinary Alternative Education Programs (DAEPs).
 - Eliminate "serious and persistent misbehavior" as a reason to discretionarily expel students from DAEPs.
 - Require school districts to consider a student's intent when applying discipline for nonviolent, non-criminal offenses.
 - Require the Texas Education Agency to notify and provide guidance to school districts with disproportionate disciplinary referrals.
 - Decriminalize challenging student behavior by removing "disruption of classes" and "disruption of transportation" from the Texas Education Code as violations for which students can be issued a criminal citation.

4. Increase funding significantly for research-based practices geared towards delinquency prevention.

- Increase funding for Services to At-Risk Youth (STAR) and Community Youth Development (CYD).
- Increase the research base of the delinquency prevention field by dedicating funding and technical assistance to the evaluation of state-funded prevention programs.

5. Improve funding for quality mental health services and services for youth with intellectual and developmental disabilities in the juvenile justice system.

- Provide flexible funding through local Community Resource Coordination Groups (CRCGs) for youth leaving juvenile justice facilities and to divert youth with complex needs from juvenile facilities,
- Invest in the Special Needs Diversionary Program for all areas of the state,
- Allow for the temporary suspension of Medicaid and CHIP benefits so that covered youth retain coverage upon release from a secure facility,
- Adequately fund mental health , substance abuse, and special education services in juvenile facilities,
- Assure that youth who leave the juvenile justice system on a mental health release are able to obtain services through the Texas Correctional Office on Offenders with Medical or Mental Impairments (TCOOMI); and
- Require the Texas Department of Family and Protective Services (DFPS) to maintain foster youth committed to juvenile facilities on an active caseload and for those children in a permanent managing conservatorship (PMC), require DFPS and/or a special advocate to visit the children on a regular basis and to advocate for their needs.

6. Coordinate an inter-agency strategic plan on juvenile delinquency issues through the Health and Human Services Commission (HHSC) Office of Program Coordination for Children and Youth to elevate coordination of and accountability for children's and youth's issues across health, human services, juvenile justice, education, and other child-serving agencies. The plan should be created with substantial stakeholder and family input and should include recommendations to the 82nd Texas Legislature regarding:

- Keeping children in family settings rather than restrictive institutional settings.
- Providing services along a continuum of care with treatment for the family system, including prevention and early intervention.
- Securing flexible funding to best meet the needs of families and youth.
- Re-establishing an interagency Legislative Appropriations Request on child and youth issues.
- Acknowledging and reducing the overrepresentation of youth of color in the juvenile justice system.
- Providing services that are not available through any other avenue to eliminate the need for parents to voluntarily relinquish custody just so their children can obtain the care they need.
- Removing barriers to local coordination of services through CRCGs.
- Ensuring that all children and youth receive appropriate assessment, diagnoses, and intervention services.

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