



March 6, 2008 110th Congress House Ways and Means, Subcommittee on Income Security and Family Support

H.R. 5466 – INVEST IN KIDS ACT

We support the Invest in Kids Act, which reforms many outdated federal policies and gives states the ability to significantly improve their child welfare systems -- keeping children out of care and decreasing the amount of time that children who must be in care spend in care.

The Invest in Kids Act is Important for Texas Children

Texas' child welfare agency had legal custody of over 31,000 children in 2006, with approximately 19,000 children residing in paid foster care. Current federal guidelines limit the use of most federal funds to covering costs for foster care. Texas needs flexibility to use federal dollars to provide services rather than to pay for foster care placements -- keeping more kids out of our foster care system.

- The Invest in Kids Act lets Texas opt to use its federal dollars for services to reduce the number of children in foster care and reduce the length of stay for children in foster care.

Texas increasingly relies on kinship caregivers to raise abused and neglected children. In 2000, 1 in 7 children was placed permanently with kinship caregivers. This figure rose to 1 in 4 in 2006. Texas provides very limited financial assistance to qualifying kinship caregivers. This assistance is not enough. Some caregivers cannot take on the responsibility of raising children without more help, and others who try are struggling.

- The Invest in Kids Act will let Texas enter into kinship caregiver assistance agreements meaning more kinship placements and more successful kinship placements.

Texas child welfare caseworkers don't stay on the job. Overall turnover increased from 19.2% in 2006 to 21.2% in 2007. During 2007, the rate of turnover was 40% in some positions. Children are at risk when caseworkers are overwhelmed and have too many cases.

- The Invest in Kids Act creates a child welfare quality improvement program grant to improve the quality of services by increasing quality and capacity of child welfare workforces or by increasing coordination of child welfare services. This grant program will allow Texas to increase the quality and capacity of its workforce and build its capacity to respond to these vulnerable children.

If we can provide any additional information, please let us know.

Respectfully submitted,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Tiffany Roper', is written over a light blue horizontal line.

Tiffany Roper
Policy Analyst