



To: House Human Services Committee Members

Presented by: Pamela McPeters

Subject: **Senate Bill 355 by West/ Kolkhorst; SP: Klick: Family First Prevention Services Act**

Date: May 7, 2019

My name is Pamela McPeters. I am the Vice President of Public Affairs for TexProtects. We are a research and advocacy organization and the Texas chapter of Prevent Child Abuse America. Thank you, Chair Frank and members, for the opportunity to testify for Senate Bill 355 to develop a Texas solution to foster care prevention services.

Every child deserves a safe and secure family. Removing a child from their biological family is traumatic, so when safe and possible, we want to keep families together. The federal Family First Act accelerates this opportunity by changing how states may use Title IV-E federal funds. Previously Title IV-E was only available for children after removal; now it may be used to prevent removal. Previously, Title IV-E was only available for the child; now it may be used for strengthening the family. Previously Title IV-E was less focused on outcomes; now it emphasizes proven and effective approaches. Family First would provide a match of 50% for prevention services – and Texas gets to define the population of children “at-risk” – giving our state a great opportunity and much flexibility. Such services build on the knowledge that most children can be safely protected and remain within their own homes when parents are equipped with appropriate support and opportunities to care for their children. The prevention strategies included in Family First address key drivers of child abuse and neglect: substance use, mental health issues, and lack of parenting skills.

On **slide 3**, you see the impacts of substance use and mental illness on child maltreatment. Most alarming are the children who lose their lives as a result. In 2017, **75% percent of child abuse or neglect fatalities involved a caregiver with a confirmed substance use or mental health concern.**

We know we can improve upon what we are doing today. On **slide 4, 43% of children whose families have received family preservation services are reconfirmed abused and or neglected within 5 years.** Confirmation of abuse requires a high burden of proof – so this level of recidivism is alarming. Much abuse goes unreported and therefore goes unaddressed. The human and financial impact to our state is too great to not act. **Slide 5** shows those costs of child maltreatment. Through Family First, we have the opportunity to bring our current services to a higher level of efficacy, better ensuring the best possible outcomes for our children while also saving dollars on the back end.

The federal Administration for Children, Youth and Families is developing a dynamic list of eligible evidence-based and trauma informed programs. The

first round of programs are on **slide 7**. The list of eligible programs will be continuously updated. Many already exist in our communities. Texas may also submit programs for approval.

Chair Frank and members, we respectfully request you support SB 355. Let's get ahead of the challenges and invest in proven programs building our capacity to reach families and changing the trajectory of the lives of our children.

TexProtects looks forward to serving as a resource for the committee as you continue your work. Thank you for your extraordinary commitment to these issues and to the families and children of Texas.