

Home Visiting Advocacy Toolkit

Join our [#HomeVisitingIsEssential](#) advocacy campaign! In this toolkit, you will find everything you need to educate and motivate your audience on social media and contact your policymakers so that these proven programs are protected and strengthened, and families have access to these programs when they are needed most.

Background

Home visiting is a prevention strategy used to support pregnant moms and new families to promote maternal and child health, foster school readiness, and prevent child abuse and neglect. Home visiting programs take a two-generational approach to decrease risk and increase protective factors to support caregivers and their children's needs.

Recognizing parents as their child's first, and often best, teacher is the foundation of home visiting. Decades of research in neurobiology has made clear the importance of children's early experiences and the opportunities inherent in the early years. The quality of these early experiences shapes brain development, which impacts future biology, behavior, and health across the lifespan. This research points to the value of ensuring access to safe, stable nurturing caregiving during the early years. Voluntary home visiting is a vehicle to connect parents and their young children to resources to protect children and foster child development by ensuring families have support when needed.

Campaign Goal and Recommendations

Goal - Ensure that home visiting investments are secured and strengthened in the upcoming 87th legislative session by engaging legislators through social media, meetings, calls, and letters with constituents and programs across the State.

Recommendations - Protect and invest in community-based, primary child abuse prevention programs for children prenatal to 5 when development matters most.

- ❖ Fully support DFPS Exceptional Item #4 (which includes \$4.3 million for Project HOPES)
- ❖ Increase Nurse Family Partnership funding by \$4 million to improve access to existing communities.
- ❖ Leverage the federal match made available by the Family First Prevention Services Act as well as Family First Transition funds to make in-home parenting programs available to families at imminent risk of entering foster care.
- ❖ Expand universal prevention approaches (including Family Connects) in public health settings to ensure that new families are safe, healthy, and connected to community resources when needed.

Advocating for Home Visiting In the 87th Legislative Session



1. Know The Latest

Sign up to receive the latest updates and new report releases from TexProtects by joining our [newsletter](#).

! COMING SOON: our [new Home Visiting page](#) will host various recent reports, facts, and resources useful for explaining what Home Visiting is, why it's important, and who should hear these facts.

Additional Resources

TexProtects is invested in providing resources that explain how prevention systems, like Home Visiting, can reduce the risk of childhood abuse and neglect. Click the links below to read additional reports created by TexProtects.

- ❖ [Early Childhood Matters:](#) This report applies newly acquired research about Texas policymakers' understanding of ECBD to inform and develop targeted messaging strategies and policy recommendations.
- ❖ [Project HOPES:](#) This one-pager is a brief explanation of Healthy Outcomes through Prevention and Early Support (HOPES) and areas currently available in Texas.
- ❖ [Child Maltreatment Prevention:](#) Evidence-based home visiting has proven to be cost-effective in fostering secure, healthy children prepared for learning, productivity, and success.
- ❖ [The Story of Early Childhood:](#) The science is clear. Early childhood matters and investments in the early years pay dividends far above interventions later in life. However, state policy and investments haven't caught up to the science.
- ❖ [ACEs:](#) A look at prevention strategies that can reduce the prevalence and impact of Adverse Childhood Experiences and increase a child's opportunity for cognitive and emotional development, health, productivity, and economic wellbeing.
- ❖ [Increased Risk of Abuse and Neglect during COVID-19:](#) Our Child Abuse and Neglect Risks During COVID-19 Report, we look at how economic recessions, unemployment, family violence, mental health, substance

abuse, and parental stress have been correlated to increases in child abuse and neglect.

- ❖ Home Visiting Landscape in Texas 2020 (coming soon)

2. Write To Your Legislators

Letters never go out of style, and a handwritten or emailed note to your policymaker is a great way to communicate the importance of home visiting. Included below is sample language to assist; however, your personal story and even pictures will be the most powerful items to have. And don't forget to point out that you are their constituent!

- ❖ Locate your state legislators and their email addresses by clicking [here](#).
- ❖ Use the sample letter below to contact your policymaker and any other state leaders critical to Home Visiting funding. These may include members of the [House Appropriations Article 2 Subcommittee](#), [House Human Services](#), [Senate Finance](#), or [Senate Health and Human Services](#).

Sample

Dear Honorable [insert title, e.g., Senator/Representative]:

A parent is a child's first and most important teacher; however, many families are stressed and strained during a child's critical years of development. Programs that help families connect to community resources and develop protective factors can empower families to be stronger and safer despite challenges.

Evidence-based home visiting has shown to reduce child maltreatment by up to 50% while increasing child and maternal health, family self-sufficiency, and protective factors. Home visiting programs generally return \$1.26 to \$8.08 per dollar spent. When we invest in the first three years of a child's life, we reduce the need for more expensive and less effective interventions later in life.

Prior to the current health crisis, home visitors were already a critical link in supporting families facing various challenges. Now, with public health at risk, increased isolation and stress in families, and the risk factors for abuse and neglect on the rise, home visiting programs such as (enter program name) are needed now more than ever.

[Optional: Enter personal story here]

As you consider legislation to meet the needs of families and communities in the upcoming 87th Legislative Session, I urge you to please:

- ❖ Protect and invest in community-based, primary child abuse prevention programs for children prenatal to age 5 when development matters most and proven programs result in significant returns on investment.
- ❖ *Insert specific recommendations for how they should support Home Visiting in the 87th Legislative Session. (See our list of recommendations on page 1 of this document)*

Every dollar spent on prevention ensures safety, health, and wellbeing for our youngest Texans. It saves the State from costly interventions across multiple systems in the years to come. Thank you for your attention to these critical needs as you continue to develop policy responses to support families during COVID-19. 2020 has been challenging, but our children can't wait.

Sincerely,

[Sign your name, title, and organization]

3. Share On Social Media

One of the quickest ways to get policymakers' attention is to reach out to them via social media. Twitter and Facebook are two of the most used platforms, especially during the legislative session. You can look up your legislators' social media handles on Google, and be sure to tag your decision-makers. Posts with images tend to create a higher engagement rate, so don't forget to use some of the graphics included below.

Social Media Copy Samples

- ❖ **#HomeVisiting**, @[tag your agency handle] plays a powerful role in supporting parents through a crisis. Please support funding to sustain services. **#HomeVisitingIsEssential** .[Tag your decision-maker/legislator]
- ❖ Only 3.8% of those most likely to benefit from **#HomeVisiting** currently have access. This legislative session, let's make sure more families have the support they need.[Tag your decision-maker/legislator] **#HomeVisitingIsEssential**
- ❖ @ [tag your agency handle] **#HomeVisiting** is among the nation's most trusted programs helping families navigating the **#COVID19** crisis. Keep **#HomeVisiting** top of mind this legislative session.[Tag your decision-maker/legislator] **#HomeVisitingIsEssential**
- ❖ Child Abuse and Neglect is preventable, let's give parents the tools they need to raise happy and healthy children. Support **#HomeVisiting**, child care, nutrition programs, maternal care, and health services during legislative session. **#HomeVisitingIsEssential**, [Tag your decision-maker/legislator]
- ❖ Voluntary **#HomeVisiting** is a vehicle to connect parents and their young children to resources to protect children and foster child development by ensuring families have support when needed. [Tag your decision-maker/legislator] **#HomeVisitingIsEssential**

! We will be adding new graphics and resources to our [new Home Visiting page](#), so don't forget to bookmark this page!

! Hashtags are labels that social media platforms use to find all things related to that content and reach a targetted audience. Use **#HomeVisitingIsEssential** and **#HomeVisiting** in all your posts to find and filter all the things Home Visiting.

! Consider creative ways to highlight virtual home visiting through charts and video posts. Click the images below for full size download.



This Legislative Session We Need To Protect Home Visiting.

In FY 2019, **15,613 families** benefited from Home Visiting programs through over **212,878** home visits.

Home Visiting Programs gives pregnant women and families necessary resources and skills to raise children who are physically, socially, and emotionally healthy and ready to succeed!

#HomeVisitingIsEssential



HOME VISITING IS ESSENTIAL.

PARENTS ARE A CHILD'S FIRST TEACHER. LET'S GIVE THEM THE TOOLS THEY NEED.

#HOMEVISITINGISESSENTIAL



Videos

Did you know that over 500 million people are watching videos on Facebook every day? Videos are one of the most effective ways to share information. They are short and feature real people making them a powerful tool to share the power of Home Visiting. Here's a few from wonderful organizations in the field of Home Visiting. Share them on your social media platforms and tag your state leaders.

- ❖ [What is Home Visiting](#)
- ❖ [Home Visiting: A Closer Look](#)
- ❖ [Texas Home Visiting Testimonial](#)
- ❖ [Family Connects: All Families Need a Little Help Sometimes](#)



Home Visiting is Essential Infographic

If you have your copy that you want to use to highlight your organization but need something to capture all the benefits of Home Visiting, consider using infographics like the one below. [Click here](#) for full size image.

Conversations with your Policymakers

Connecting with policymakers is easy and can be done by phone, video chat, or (even better) in person.

Use the steps below to guide a phone call or to meet with policymakers. Identify your state representative and senator (and other Texas elected officials) by looking up their information [here](#).

Define Home Visiting: Home visiting programs are family support, voluntary, two-generational programs that work with at-risk families with young children (typically 0-5) in their home environment. When families are provided with access to resources and education in their homes from health care providers, social workers, and other professionals, they receive the help they need to become more resilient, handle stress, and be more confident raising their children. As a result, children can live safer and healthier lives, which sets them up on a trajectory where they are on track to grow and learn.

Describe your home visiting program and its impact on your community:

- ❖ Let your Legislator know the numbers of families, children, and parents that you reach in your community.
- ❖ Share inspirational and touching stories that have happened because of your program – specifically touch on ways home visiting programs have been a critical lifeline for families during COVID-19 – providing a needed connection for families who are otherwise isolated and stressed.
- ❖ Briefly touch on some of the great outcomes your program has demonstrated directly in your community. Pull these outcomes ahead of time and provide numbers and statistics if your Legislator requests more detailed information.

Don't be nervous! You can do this! Your representatives are committed to listening and connecting with constituents. It's easy to get excited about programs that protect children and strengthen families. Suppose a question comes up, and you don't know the answer. In that case, you can always say, "I'm not sure about that" and/or follow-up after the meeting after you've been able to find the resources or answers they may need. You can always reach out to Jennifer Lucy at TexProtects (jennifer@texprotects.org) with questions before or after a meeting or call.

4. Call Your Representative

A quick call to your Legislator's office can make a big difference. Legislative staffers keep notes and share the number of constituents calling regarding Home Visiting. There's power in numbers!

- ❖ Remember to wrap up your call with the most important takeaway, a personal story, and/or budget ask.
- ❖ If making a legislative funding request, let them know of the specific request and help them understand where these programs live in the budget.
 - ❖ Current home visiting funding is insufficient – only 5% of the DFPS budget is spent on evidence-based preventions that intervene to keep families out of the CPS system.
 - ❖ Texas is serving less than 4% of the 412,609 families in highest need. These are families with children under six living with three or more risk factors.
 - ❖ We are requesting full support for DFPS Exceptional Item #4 which includes \$4.3 million additional dollars from the State to expand evidence-based and promising home visiting programs, such as _____ (mention your program) through Project HOPES (for example).
 - ❖ The Prevention and Early Intervention Division currently funds Home Visiting Programs. They can be found in line item C1.4 and C1.5 of the DFPS budget.
 - ❖ Ask for their support.

5. Schedule a Meeting with Your Representative

Putting a face to the issue is powerful! When you meet with your legislators, they can see the real-life impact of Home Visiting. Also, we are living during virtual times, which has its advantages! Since people do not have to schedule "travel time" in-between in-person meetings, it opens up more time in their schedule to meet virtually.

Below is a step-by-step guide to setting up a meeting and additional talking points you can reference during your meeting or call.

- ❖ Call the offices of your Representative and Senator and identify yourself as a constituent. Ask to speak to the scheduler. Ask if the Legislator or a staff member (meeting with staff is okay!) has 15 minutes for a meeting (if you would like to meet in person), or if a staff member has 5 minutes to speak to you over the phone about home visiting programs in their district.
- ❖ Let them know that you support Family Support Home Visiting. You may use the following talking points:
 - ❖ Define Home Visiting.
 - ❖ Describe your home visiting program and its impact on your community.
 - ❖ If making a legislative funding request, let them know of the specific request and help them understand where these programs live in the budget.
 - ❖ Current home visiting funding is insufficient - only 5% of the DFPS budget is spent on evidence-based prevention that intervene to keep families out of the CPS system.
 - ❖ Texas is serving less than 4% of the 412,609 families in the highest need. These are families with children under six living with three or more risk factors.
 - ❖ We are requesting full support for DFPS Exceptional Item #4 which requests \$4.3 million additional dollars from the State to invest in evidence-based and promising prevention programs, such as _____ (mention your program)
 - ❖ The Prevention and Early Intervention Division currently funds Home Visiting Programs. They can be found in line item C1.4 and C1.5 of the DFPS budget.
 - ❖ Ask for their support.
- ❖ Follow-up your conversation with an email or, more preferably, a handwritten note, thanking them for their time and support of your program in their district!
 - ❖ Include pictures or other tangible items from your program, if possible.
 - ❖ Share additional data or resources on your program/impact, and let them know that you are available as a resource to them.

6. Complete and Share Advocacy Alerts.

There's power in numbers! When Legislators receive large numbers of letters from their constituents, they know the issue matters and affects many. TexProtects has made it easy to send our state leaders messages about important issues to our community. Our advocacy alerts are pre-written letters on individual topics that can be customized (if you choose) and sent to your representatives quickly when you enter your zip code. These advocacy alerts take less than a minute to complete and can be shared with your network through emails and social media to increase impact!

Visit our [Take Legislative Action](#) page to find our current home visiting advocacy alert and more.

Talking Points On Home Visiting

What is Home Visiting?

- ❖ Evidence-based, voluntary, home-based parent mentoring programs, also known as home visiting, match parents with trained professionals to provide information and support during pregnancy and throughout their child's early years. There are several different home visiting programs operating in Texas (13), each with a unique set of defined goals and families that they serve. A continuum of home visiting programs is necessary to prevent the myriad of lifelong negative outcomes associated with trauma and adverse experiences in early childhood.
- ❖ Some home visiting program models partner with expectant moms to encourage behaviors that dramatically decrease their chances of having a premature, low birth-weight or substance-exposed baby. Other programs work with children before they enter kindergarten to increase their school readiness. There are a number of programs in Texas to meet the individual and unique needs of all families.

Why is it important?

- ❖ Parents are the most important people in their children's lives. They are the first and best teachers. Home visiting programs equip young mothers and families with the tools and skills they need to do that job as effectively as possible.
- ❖ Even prenatally, early experiences establish either a sturdy or a fragile foundation for the learning, health, and behavior that follow. They influence whether children see the world as responsive, reliable, and trustworthy - or frightening, unreliable, dangerous. These relationships form the basis for children's ability to learn, build relationships, and function as productive adults.¹
- ❖ Even the most loving parents, faced with major challenges and difficult circumstances, may need knowledge and help to provide the best start for their child.
- ❖ Many children grow up in a "toxic" environment that is detrimental to their health and wellbeing. Research has shown that children who experience child abuse and neglect or other adverse childhood experiences or trauma are more likely to suffer from a range of negative health outcomes as adults, including arthritis, asthma, and high blood pressure, to name a few.²
- ❖ Every family wants to provide the very best for their children; however, many families struggle against challenges that make it difficult to give a strong start.
- ❖ Evidence-based home visiting programs have proven results and returns.

Child Abuse and Neglect Statistics

- ❖ Four children die from child abuse/neglect every week. 181 children are confirmed victims of child maltreatment every day.
- ❖ Most fatalities occur in children under age 3. The highest rates of abuse are also in children younger than age 3.
- ❖ Over 63,000 children were confirmed victims of child abuse and neglect in 2019. We know that much abuse goes unreported.
- ❖ Over 70% of confirmed CPS cases are for neglect rather than abuse – this demonstrates that families in crisis need a support system more than a protection system.
- ❖ Preventing 3% of removals (553) would save Texas \$20 million.
- ❖ Texas will spend over \$55 billion on the after-effects of the abuse/neglect confirmed in 2019 alone.

Outcomes

- ❖ Talk about outcomes from YOUR program in your community!
- ❖ Evidence-based and promising home visiting programs have been shown to reduce short and long-term healthcare costs by reducing incidences of low-birth-weight babies, child abuse and neglect, and emergency room visits.
- ❖ These programs prevent child abuse and neglect and positively impact education, maternal and child health, family self-sufficiency, and resiliency.
- ❖ Nurse Family Partnership reports a \$5.70 return for every dollar invested. Family Connects returns \$3.02 for every dollar invested.
- ❖ The HOPES program costs \$3,009 per family compared to the \$830,000 in lifetime costs for every child maltreatment victim.

For More Information

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¹ National Scientific Council on the Developing Child, “The Science of Early Childhood Development.”

http://developingchild.harvard.edu/wp-content/uploads/2015/05/Science_Early_Childhood_Development.pdf

(Accessed August 5, 2011).

² Child Welfare Information Gateway, “Long-Term Consequences of Child Abuse and Neglect,” (2008). (accessed February 4, 2011). http://www.childwelfare.gov/pubs/factsheets/long_term_consequences.pdf.

³ Institute for the Advancement of Family Support Professional, “Rapid Response: Home Visiting Is Essential” (2020)

https://cppr-institute-prod.s3.amazonaws.com/modules/resources/web/crr/resources/RR_VHV_OnePager.pdf