



To: House Committee on Public Education
Presenter: Jennifer Lucy
Subject: House Bill 3718
Date: March 26, 2019

Good afternoon! My name is Jennifer Lucy. I am the Director of Public Policy for TexProtects. We are a research and advocacy organization and the Texas chapter of Prevent Child Abuse America. Thank you, Chair Huberty and members, for the opportunity to testify in support of HB 3718.

The reality in Texas today is that more than 1 in 5 Texas children have experienced multiple adverse childhood experiences that are likely affecting their ability to succeed at school. As a former educator with over 10 years of experience, I would suggest that the percentage is much higher in many classrooms across this state.

Adverse childhood experiences such as child maltreatment or living in a home with mental illness, substance use, or violence can cause chronic stress and trauma that disrupts the architecture and chemistry of the developing brain.

This can lead to difficulties in learning, memory, social interaction, and self-regulation.

These biological changes also result in dramatically increased likelihoods of risky behaviors as well as physical and mental illness across the lifespan.

One of the effects of early and/or ongoing trauma is an overactivation of the brain's alarm systems, meaning that these children may fight, freeze, or flee in circumstances that would not trigger the child sitting next to them. This is not because something is wrong with them. It is because of what has happened to them.

The good news is that we know healthy relationships with supportive adults in safe environments can build the resilience and skills needed for children to overcome adversity and thrive. Simple, trauma-informed techniques can help children increase feelings of safety so that they can re-engage their "thinking" brain and engage productively in the classroom.

HB 3718 will ensure that school staff and parents are equipped with evidence-informed training on how trauma affects our students and then how to respond in ways that will de-escalate stressed responses, avoid retraumatizing our students, and create an environment of safety.

Trauma-sensitive schools have the potential to increase positive outcomes among *all* students, regardless of trauma history. Becoming trauma informed is not a checklist, but a change in mindset that has the potential to increase student engagement and attendance, decrease referrals and suspensions, and accelerate academic success

while minimizing the disruptions and conflicts that can interrupt a teacher's ability to deliver high quality academic content.

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.