

Family Preservation through Texas Family First Pilots

To ensure families have the support they need to remain together, Texas can capitalize on federal funding through the Family First Prevention Services Act (FFPSA). **A goal of FFPSA is to provide evidence-based parenting, mental health, and substance use treatments/services to families that are at risk of entering foster care, with the aim of preventing the removal of a child.**

To access FFPSA funding, a state must develop and submit a prevention plan, which Texas has not yet drafted. Texas has received some FFPSA startup grant funds, which were primarily used to launch the Texas Family First pilots created in 2021 by Chair Frank's HB 3041 in the 87th Legislative Session. Unfortunately, these FFPSA startup grant dollars will expire in 2025.

The Texas Family First pilots require court oversight and are run by Community-Based Care (CBC) contractors:

St. Francis Ministries in the Panhandle (Region 1)
2INgage in the Big Country and Texoma area (Region 2)
Our Community Our Kids in Metroplex West (Region 3b)
Belong in the South Central and Hill Country area (Region 8b)

DFPS has expressed interest in expanding the pilots into Bexar and Harris counties, pending CBC contract approval.

According to DFPS, 396 families have been referred, and 115 families have successfully completed the program since October 2022. There are 130 active families and 12 families pending court hearings between the pilots.

Policy Recommendation

TexProtects recommends the use of federal FFPSA funding to sustain the Texas Family First Pilots. Since the beginning of the pilots, we have learned their value and want to see this grow to reach more families in Texas. This would involve the state investing General Revenue to pull down this federal funding. These pilots strengthen and expand the availability of evidence-based family preservation services for families who are at "imminent risk" of removal of their children. They also minimize further CPS intervention by providing funding for additional supportive services to families where there is risk of maltreatment.

Cost: DFPS has included these pilots in their Legislative Appropriations Request (LAR) as a placeholder. Once these costs are determined, TexProtects urges the Legislature to support this ask.

There have been issues across the country in drawing down these funds. It has taken states with an approved prevention plan years to receive the dollars. Taking this into consideration, it is vital that Texas develops a plan swiftly to eliminate even more unnecessary wait time on this funding.

Concurrently, there are efforts across the country to ensure more flexibility when states draw down these federal dollars. TexProtects is joining these efforts to ensure that Texas families have access to supports to preserve their family, eliminating the need for involvement with the child protection system. The goal of this advocacy is to see families strengthened and communities equipped to meet the unique needs of their families. These federal dollars allow states to be the decision-maker, determining what their community needs most. By sustaining and expanding the reach of the Family First Pilots, parents will be equipped to care for their children and this proactive approach will lessen the communities' reliance on the child welfare system to be the main source for community services.

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