

SUBJECT: Prevention and early intervention for youth at-risk of delinquency and abuse

COMMITTEE: Human Services — favorable, without amendment

VOTE: 9 ayes — Naishtat, Maxey, Chavez, Christian, J. Davis, Noriega, Telford, Truitt, Wohlgemuth

0 nays

SENATE VOTE: On final passage, April 12 — voice vote

WITNESSES: For — Melanie Gantt, Mental Health Association in Texas; Yolanda Munson, Fort Worth Independent School District’s Parents as Teachers; Mike Steele, Communities in Schools of Texas, Inc.; Theresa Tod, Texas Network of Youth Services

Against — None

BACKGROUND: As part of a restructuring of the state’s health and human service programs, the 72nd Legislature created the Department of Protective and Regulatory Services (DPRS) in 1991 as a separate agency focused on children, the elderly, and people with disabilities. DPRS currently administers a number of programs aimed at helping youth at risk of delinquency, child abuse, truancy, dropping out, and running away. These programs include the Services to At-Risk Youth (STAR), Community Youth Development, Family Outreach, Healthy Families, Home Instruction Program for Preschool Youth (HIPPY), Gang Activity Prevention (GAP), and the Texas Runaway Hotline programs. These programs are organized within the Community Initiatives Division of DPRS.

Some state programs for at-risk youth and their families are managed by other agencies. The Senate Interim Committee on Gangs and Juvenile Justice reported that 32 such programs are operated by 17 agencies, including:

- ! the Buffalo Soldier Heritage Program, operated by the Texas Juvenile Probation Commission;
- ! Communities In Schools (CIS), operated jointly by the Texas Workforce Commission and the Texas Education Agency; and

- ! Parents as Teachers, operated by the Texas Department of Mental Health and Mental Retardation.

The Buffalo Soldier Heritage Program places youths aged 10 to 17 into experiences similar to those of the famed African-American soldiers while teaching them history, camping skills, discipline, responsibility, and self-esteem. The program operates in five counties on a pilot basis.

CIS is an in-school, multi-disciplinary approach to decreasing the dropout rate in Texas schools. The CIS state office administers contracts with local CIS programs, designs and implements statewide training and technical assistance programs, provides fiscal monitoring services, and fosters local partnerships of private businesses, government agencies, non-profit organizations, and schools.

Parents as Teachers is an early childhood family education and support program designed to help parents guide their children's emotional, social, intellectual, language, and physical development. Services include personal visits by trained parent educators, group meetings, a child development resource center, and referrals to other programs as appropriate.

DIGEST:

SB 1574 would create the Prevention and Early Intervention Services Division within DPRS to:

- ! set up a comprehensive delivery system of prevention and early intervention services to children in at-risk situations and their families;
- ! coordinate and improve responsiveness of these services, increasing flexibility in the use of funds by state and local providers;
- ! provide greater accountability for these services; and
- ! assist local communities in coordinating and developing these services to maximize federal, state, and local resources.

Current DPRS programs for at-risk youths would be transferred to the new division, as would the Parents as Teachers Program, the Communities In Schools Program, and the Buffalo Soldier Heritage Program. All powers, duties, obligations, contracts, records, employees, property, and funds of these programs would be transferred to DPRS.

SB 1574 would take effect September 1, 1999.

**SUPPORTERS
SAY:**

SB 1574 is a good start to consolidating the state's prevention and early intervention services into a single division within a single state agency. Putting these programs together would eliminate fragmentation and duplication of services. It would increase the efficiency of delivering these services, and would provide a single point of access for youths, their families, and their communities.

The bill would encourage better accountability, as well as coordination and improvement of services at the local level. It would enable the state, with its local partners, to provide a complete range of services to at-risk youths.

The bill would provide a more cohesive funding strategy for prevention and early intervention programs. DPRS would have the ability to improve the use of resources among these programs and to maximize outside sources of funding.

All of the affected agencies agreed that bringing these programs together into a single division that would provide a greater focus on prevention and early intervention programs and ultimately make it easier for families to obtain the services they need. Transferring fewer than 20 employees to DPRS would have no fiscal implication and require minimal effort.

**OPPONENTS
SAY:**

No apparent opposition.