

SUBJECT: Interagency coordinating council to prevent child abuse and neglect

COMMITTEE: Juvenile Justice and Family Issues —favorable, without amendment

VOTE: 7 ayes — Dutton, Goodman, Castro, Y. Davis, Dunnam, J. Moreno, Thompson

0 nays

2 absent — Nixon, Strama

WITNESSES: For — Conni Barker, DePelchin Children's Center; Carol Miller, The National Association of Social Workers - Texas; Monica Thyssen, Advocacy, Inc.

Against — None

On — Jeanie Coale, Department of Family and Protective Services

DIGEST: HB 1685 create the Interagency Coordinating Council for Building Healthy Families to help state agencies with communication and collaboration on child abuse and neglect prevention policies and on programs and services to promote and foster healthy families.

The council would consist of one representative each from nine state agencies appointed by the executive director or commissioner of the agency:

- Department of Family and Protective Services (DFPS);
- Health and Human Services Commission (HHSC);
- Department of State Health Services (DSHS);
- Texas Youth Commission (TYC);
- Department of Aging and Disability (DADS);
- Texas Education Agency (TEA);
- Texas Workforce Commission (TWC);
- Office of the Attorney General (OAG); and
- Texas Juvenile Probation Commission (TJPC).

The representative from DFPS would serve as the presiding officer of the council.

The interagency coordinating council would meet at least quarterly. Not later than June 1, 2006, the council would submit to state leadership an inventory of the child abuse and neglect prevention policies, programs, and activities of each agency represented. By December 1, 2006, the council would report their recommendations for improving the coordination and collaboration of child abuse and neglect prevention programs and services among the state agencies. The report would include the council's recommendation on whether to continue the council.

This provision would expire September 1, 2007.

The bill would take immediate effect if finally passed by a two-thirds record vote of the membership of each house. Otherwise, it would take effect September 1, 2005.

**SUPPORTERS
SAY:**

Reports of child abuse and neglect have continued to rise, and the state needs to respond. An interagency council would provide for better coordination among state agencies, as well as early intervention. Current efforts are fragmented across multiple agencies, and a coordinating council would improve communication and collaboration among them.

An interagency coordinating council could develop a better inventory of existing programs and services and a better assessment of their effectiveness. From these assessments, the council members could work together to improve the programs.

The council could help promote prevention, with the goal being to shift the need for money going into remedial system response units and to invest it at the front end of the cycle. It is the most cost-effective and life-saving mechanism the state could put in place and integral to decreasing abuse and neglect cases and child removals.

The coordinating council would enhance risk prevention because a broad range of policies and programs is necessary to intercede in the various factors putting a family at risk for abuse and neglect.

State agencies already have many responsibilities, and without a specific mandate to communicate and coordinate, the goal to do so may not be

realized. Implementing the council also would show that the Legislature is serious about improving the health and well-being of Texas children. The fiscal note shows no significant cost to the state.

**OPPONENTS
SAY:**

The intervention programs are already in place within the agencies, so this interagency collaboration could be done without legislation.