



August 21, 2012

Texas Juvenile Justice Department
P.O. Box 12757
Austin, Texas 78711

Dear TJJD Board Members:

As the board finalizes its legislative appropriations request, we urge you to recommend only those options that support the goals and purposes set out in Senate Bill 653, the legislation that created the Juvenile Justice Department.

Specifically, we urge you not to recommend any reductions in funding to county probation programs. Reducing funding for county programs would work against the explicit goals of Senate Bill 653 and would move Texas backwards towards a more costly and less effective juvenile justice system. County juvenile probation programs rely on state funding,¹ and a board recommendation to reduce county probation funding will decimate successful county programs, ultimately increasing the need for expensive state custody.

The first goal of the Texas Juvenile Justice Department, set out in Senate Bill 653, is to “support the development of a consistent county-based continuum” of juvenile services. This focus on local programs has saved Texas millions of dollars and has achieved better outcomes for Texas youth: Housing a youth in a state secure facility costs over \$350 a day, but housing a youth in a county secure post-adjudication facility costs just under \$170 a day, and placing a youth in community-based intensive supervision costs only \$40 a day.² As counties continue to implement best practices that improve outcomes for youth, they are realizing millions in additional taxpayer savings while keeping communities as safe as ever.³

Unfortunately, as Texas counties have been tasked with serving more high-risk youth diverted from state custody, funding for these county programs has not kept pace with the additional responsibilities. Three-in-four county juvenile probation departments now report that their funding is insufficient or very insufficient.⁴

While prioritizing county probation funding, the board has many options to implement best practices in our state secure juvenile facilities. For example, the average length of stay for youth in state facilities is currently 16 months,⁵ far longer than is effective according to several studies.⁶ The board can also increase Grant C funding to divert more youth from expensive state facilities.

Sincerely,

Disability Rights Texas
Texas Appleseed
Texas Criminal Justice Coalition

¹ Texas Criminal Justice Coalition “Financial Survey of Texas Juvenile Probation” (August 2012).

² Legislative Budget Board “Criminal Justice Uniform Cost Report: Fiscal Years 2008 - 2010” (January 2011).

³ See, e.g., Harris County “Juvenile Detention Alternatives Initiative: 2006-2011” (July 2012).

⁴ Texas Criminal Justice Coalition “Financial Survey of Texas Juvenile Probation” (August 2012).

⁵ Legislative Budget Board “Monthly Tracking Report” (July 2012).

⁶ See Texas Public Policy Foundation “Out for Life: Pathways to More Effective Reentry for Texas Juvenile Offenders” (January 2012).