

July 23, 2020

The Honorable Greg Abbott

Governor of Texas

Office of the Governor

P.O. Box 12428

Austin, TX 78711-2428

Delivered via email

Legislative Budget Board - Board Members:

The Honorable Dan Patrick, Joint Chair

The Honorable Dennis Bonnen, Joint Chair

The Honorable Kelly Hancock

The Honorable Dustin Burrows

The Honorable Joan Huffman

The Honorable Giovanni Capriglione

The Honorable Jane Nelson

The Honorable Mary González

The Honorable Larry Taylor

The Honorable Oscar Longoria

Delivered via email

Re: Proposed Cuts to Early Childhood Intervention (ECI) Respite Care

Dear Governor Abbott and LBB - Board Members:

The undersigned Texas organizations advocate to ensure that infants and toddlers with developmental delays or disabilities and their families receive critical Early Childhood Intervention (ECI) services to meet individualized needs. ECI provides an array of family-centered, home-based and virtual services that support the wellbeing of children and families, ensure kids are school ready and families are connected to resources. In light of the flexibilities authorized by Governor Abbott and rapid action by ECI providers, these services have continued to provide a lifeline for families during the COVID-19 crisis.

We send this letter today to express our concern regarding the [recommendation from the Health and Human Services Commission \(HHSC\) to cut funding for ECI respite services](#), a critical service within the program aimed at alleviating stress on families and reducing the risk of child abuse. **We ask you to decline the current recommendation to cut funding to ECI respite services and defend the wellbeing of Texas families of young children with developmental disabilities and delays.**

ECI respite funding allows parents to receive temporary care for their children, providing families with community support and much needed relief from the day-to-day stresses of parenting a child with complex needs. The state ECI program not only supports children's development, it also serves as one of the state's most targeted child abuse prevention strategies. By ensuring that parents and caregivers of children with disabilities and delays have the training and support necessary to promote their children's healthy development, the program significantly decreases the incidence of child abuse. One of the primary ECI services that works toward prevention is respite offered by ECI contractors. Respite gives short-term relief to families dealing with the stress and around-the-clock responsibility of caring for a family member with a disability. By decreasing toxic stress and supporting a family's emotional and mental health, respite establishes key preventive factors against child abuse. Respite services are available for approximately 2,000 ECI families a year, and for those fortunate families, the service is critical.

In light of the [recent Court Monitors' report](#) showing that Texas still has ongoing issues that put children at risk for abuse and neglect, cutting ECI respite services right now would be moving in the wrong direction. The unprecedented circumstances due to the COVID-19 pandemic have caused many families to face additional stressors, such as job loss, decreased income, loss of healthcare, housing instability, and lack of childcare, all risk factors for abuse and neglect. Subsequently more families, particularly families of children with developmental disabilities and delays, are in need of community services such as respite care, to support emotional and mental health. **We urge the state to protect funding for ECI respite services and ensure that there are no cuts to all of the critical ECI services.**

We appreciate your attention to this critical issue and for your leadership during the COVID-19 crisis. If you have any questions, please contact Jolene Sanders-Foster, Coalition of Texans with Disabilities at jsanders@txdisabilities.org and Lauren Rangel, Easterseals Central Texas at lrangel@eastersealstx.org. We look forward to hearing from you.

cc: Office of the Governor Director of Policy and Budget Sarah Hicks
Legislative Budget Board Director Jerry McGinty
HHSC Executive Commissioner Phil Wilson
HHSC Chief Financial Officer Trey Wood

Sincerely,

Any Baby Can
Autism Society of Texas
Central Counties Services
Coalition of Texans with Disabilities
Easterseals Central Texas
Family to Family Network
Paso del Norte Children's Development Center
Texans Care for Children
Texas Council for Community Centers
Texas Parent to Parent
TexProtects