



Children's Commission.

For Judges Handling Child Protective Services Cases

February 10, 2017

Dear Judges,

At our November Child Welfare Conference, we heard from DFPS leadership about the state's foster care capacity crisis that has resulted in children sleeping in agency offices and motels. This practice places the children and caseworkers at risk and further traumatizes youth in care. Many of you eagerly asked Department leadership what you could do to help. First, thank you for inquiring. Second, I want to let you know that the Children's Commission is working with DFPS to develop a resource that may help to guide your efforts locally, but that resource is not quite ready for distribution. In the interim, Kristene Blackstone, Associate Commissioner for Child Protective Services, has requested that the Children's Commission share with you the following message designed to help recruit foster homes and community support in your area. Please consider whether you are able to publicize the following message in your locale via a newspaper article or editorial. You are welcome to edit this as you see fit for your community.

"Children and youth thrive when their basic needs are met in a safe and stable environment. In turn, Texas thrives when our children and youth grow up to be strong, healthy and productive members of their communities. When children and youth cannot safely remain in their own homes, it is Child Protective Services' (CPS) responsibility to ensure they are in a safe and appropriate environment that meets their individual needs and keeps them connected to their families, friends, schools and faith-based communities, but CPS cannot carry this responsibility alone. To be successful, this effort requires the participation of all stakeholders, including community partners, foster care and service providers, faith leaders, foster families, judges, and attorneys and advocates. Quality foster care placements are essential to meet this goal.

When the state assumes responsibility for children and youth, their specialized needs and circumstances sometimes prevent placement close to home due to a lack of foster care capacity. Good foster parents are critical resources to help care for and stabilize children and youth who may be far away from everything familiar to them. Whether their foster care journey ends with being returned to their family, adoption or independent living, every child in care needs a good home to provide a loving family environment for as long as that child is living there. Right now there is a severe statewide shortage of foster parents for older youth ages 14 to 18, sibling groups of three or more, and children with serious medical needs such as seizures and diabetes. Children and youth dealing with aggression, sexual abuse, self-harming behaviors and a history of drug use are particularly vulnerable and need especially well-trained and supportive foster homes.

Now more than ever, Texas needs compassionate foster parents to come forward. Please encourage those in your places of worship, friends, and community organizations that you are part of to consider fostering or adopting. In addition, there are others ways to assist such as, providing donations to the Rainbow Resource Rooms, becoming a mentor to youth transitioning out of foster care, or providing a meal or babysitting services for a foster family. Several local communities are partnering with public officials, politicians, universities, media outlets, churches and Child Protective Services to educate the public on foster parenting and how to help children in the state's care.

Please contact the DFPS Office of Volunteer and Community Engagement at comenga@dfps.state.tx.us for suggestions on how you can help. For information about becoming a foster family, please review the resources available at the following link: http://www.dfps.state.tx.us/Adoption_and_Foster_Care/Get_Started/default.asp. Thank you for considering this wonderful, rewarding way to be a part of the solution for Texas' foster children."



Hon. Dean Rucker

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