

## Texas Court Improvement Program Five Year Strategic Plan

State Name: Texas

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Timeframe Covered by Strategic Plan: 10/01/16 - 09/30/21

**Mission:** To strengthen courts for children, youth and families in the Texas child-protection system and thereby improve the safety, permanency, and well-being of children.

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### GOALS:

- I. Encourage judicial leadership, accountability, and appropriate oversight of child protection cases to improve safety, permanency, and well-being of children and families.
- II. Promote, expand, and share best and promising child welfare and court practices and resources to improve judicial administration and strengthen the child welfare system.
- III. Facilitate and institutionalize collaboration, communication, and respect between the judicial system and child welfare partners.
- IV. Promote high-quality court proceedings that safeguard due process, child and family involvement, and effective legal representation of parties.
- V. Collect and analyze court and child welfare system data to improve outcomes, quality, and sustainability of Children's Commission strategies.
- VI. Develop, support and fund high-quality, appropriate training for judges, attorneys, and child welfare partners.
- VII. Reduce racial and ethnic disproportionality and disparities in the child welfare system.
- VIII. Recognize and respect tribal sovereignty, and protect the best interests of Native American children and promote stability of Native American children and families.
- IX. Oversee and administer the Court Improvement Program (CIP) funds to assess current and future needs of the courts, endeavor to increase funding available to the Children's Commission and leverage funds with strategic and statewide partners.

- I. **Encourage judicial leadership, accountability, and appropriate oversight of child protection cases to improve safety, permanency, and well-being of children and families.**
  - A. Participate in and provide resources to statewide collaborative efforts to improve child safety.
  - B. Support the improvement of education outcomes for children in the conservatorship of DFPS to increase opportunities for educational progress, leading to a more productive and stable adult life.
  - C. Promote awareness of and embed a culture and practice among the judiciary and legal community around Trauma Informed Care so that the legal and judicial community is aware, educated and supportive of the concept and application.
  - D. Promote awareness of and provide training, resources and support for addressing Human Trafficking and specifically Child Sexual Exploitation so that the judicial system can assist in preventing the commercial sexual exploitation of children in DFPS' conservatorship.
  - E. Promote the value of mediation in CPS cases, which may, in turn, help children and families exit the child welfare system more quickly.
  - F. Collaborate with the full continuum of providers, including health and mental health providers, to identify ways to enhance effective and efficient services and supports for children in foster care and their caregivers.
  
- II. **Promote, expand, and share best and promising child welfare and court practices and resources to improve judicial administration and strengthen the child welfare system.**
  - A. Create opportunities to bring together subject matter experts, judicial and executive branch leaders, and key policy makers so that important and urgent issues are examined and recommendations and solutions can be identified.
  - B. Ensure availability of quality judicial resources such as the Bench Book, Jurist in Residence (JIR) support, and JIR correspondence and communicate to ensure judges are equipped to make informed educated decisions, and use best practices in conducting hearings that will contribute to better outcomes for children and families.
  - C. Ensure availability of high-quality attorney resources such as Attorney Resource Letters, an attorney webpage on the CC website, and other relevant events to improve court-related outcomes for children and parents through legal representation that is trained and informed.
  - D. Maintain and enhance the Children's Commission website to provide an easily accessible, user-friendly resources for the judiciary, attorneys and the child welfare community to obtain information and best practices in their interactions with children and families.
  - E. Support county, state, and national child welfare leaders to enhance the opportunity to gain knowledge and competency and share experience and expertise with Texas.
  - F. Support the use of best practices in court case management
  
- III. **Facilitate and institutionalize collaboration, communication, and respect between the judicial system and child welfare partners.**

- A. Promote and support institutional collaboration among high-level state, legislative, and judicial leaders, as well as among multi-disciplinary child welfare stakeholders so there is open and continuous dialogue between and among the various child welfare partners.
  - B. Engage in policy and procedural improvements that advance child welfare system functionality, promote effective and equitable services, and ensure justice for all parties.
- IV. Promote high-quality court proceedings that safeguard due process, child and family involvement, and effective legal representation of parties.**
- A. Improve legal representation so that parents, children, and the State of Texas experience high-quality court hearings.
  - B. Develop, adopt and promote standards of practice for attorneys representing parties in child protection cases so that attorneys are encouraged to gain a higher level of expertise and provide high-quality legal representation.
  - C. Establish a specialization through the Texas Board of Legal Specialization so that attorneys who wish to achieve a higher level of understanding and expertise can provide higher caliber of legal representation.
  - D. Create, distribute, maintain, support, and evaluate resources for parents involved in CPS cases so that parents can gain more equal footing and support for their rights once they become involved with CPS.
  - E. Improve and expand engagement of families and caregivers in court hearings so that court hearings are higher quality and more meaningful for the families and children involved.
  - F. Improve and expand engagement of youth in court hearings so that youth feel more involved and assured that their voice is heard and important to the decisions being made about their lives.
- V. Collect and analyze court and child welfare system data to develop solutions to improve outcomes, quality, and sustainability of Children’s Commission strategies.**
- A. Ensure data collection, analysis and continuous quality improvement (CQI) is incorporated in each grant and project in order to highlight the success, opportunities for improvement, and the potential for sustainability of the project or grant.
  - B. Use agency administrative data to improve permanency outcomes for children and families.
  - C. Engage in CFSP/APSR/CFSR/CIP partnership with DFPS so that CIP and DFPS can better understand and improve the content, processes, and uses of the various reports.
- VI. Develop, support and fund high-quality, appropriate training for judges, attorneys, and child welfare partners.**
- A. Provide high-quality, affordable, and easily accessible training resources for judges and attorneys to ensure that attorneys and judges are educated and knowledgeable in order to employ best practices in providing legal representation and in conducting hearings.
- VII. Reduce racial and ethnic disproportionality and disparities in the child welfare system.**

- A. Support efforts to address disproportionality and disparities in the Texas child welfare system so that children of color do not experience disparate effects and outcomes that prolong their stay in foster care.

**VIII. Recognize and respect tribal sovereignty, protect the best interests of Native American children, and promote stability of Native American children and families.**

- A. Establish, strengthen and support meaningful and respectful relationships with tribal nations and promote awareness, education, and application of the Indian Child Welfare Act so that Indian children and families experience equitable and respectful treatment in keeping with their customs and beliefs.

**IX. Oversee and administer the Court Improvement Program (CIP) funds to assess current and future needs of the courts, endeavor to increase funding available to the Children’s Commission and leverage funds with strategic and statewide partners.**

- A. Execute strategies of the Supreme Court Children’s Commission to help strengthen courts and the child welfare system to improve outcomes of safety, permanency, and well-being.