



DPC Issue Brief

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for Texans with disabilities.*

Title: Mental Health Services and Initiatives for Youth in the Juvenile Justice System

Background: According to the National Center for Mental Health and Juvenile Justice, youth with serious emotional disturbances are over-represented in the juvenile system. Too often, children who do not receive mental health services in the community end up in the juvenile justice system and many families feel forced to have their child arrested in order to obtain mental health services. The Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention estimates that fifty to seventy-five percent of the children involved in the juvenile justice system are youths of color who have never had access to mental health screenings or treatments.

According to the Texas Juvenile Probation Commission (TJPC), 47.5 % of TJPC youth have a mental health disorder. In FY 2005, 48% of the youth committed to the Texas Youth Commission (TYC) had a serious mental illness. Also, a total of 4692 youth from local juvenile probation departments could benefit from this change.

Recommendation: The Disability Policy Consortium (DPC) recommends that the Texas Legislature should:

- Require that a common comprehensive health screening and assessment tool be utilized by the Texas Juvenile Probation Commission (TJPC), the Texas Youth Commission (TYC) and the Department of Family and Protective Services (DFPS), so that youth who are involved with the juvenile justice system and other child serving systems can be accurately identified and provided with appropriate mental health and substance abuse services;
- Direct the Health and Human Services Commission to allow for the temporary suspension rather than termination of Medicaid benefits for youth who are in detention so that they can have access to community mental health services when they are released from detention.
- Fund the Texas Juvenile Probation Commissions and the Texas Youth Commissions LAR exceptional item request to fund mental health and substance abuse services for youth who are in detention;
- Increase the funding for the Texas Youth Commission aftercare programs that help to ensure that youth with mental health/behavioral health needs will successfully transition from TYC to the community.
- Increase prevention funding to the Department of Family and Protective Services, Prevention and Early Intervention Division for community-based programs that prevent youth from entering the juvenile justice and Texas Youth Commission system; and
- Fund the Texas Youth Commissions LAR exceptional item request to lower its staff to youth ratios to national standards and to increase staff training.

Contact information: Monica Thyssen, Advocacy, Inc., 7800 Shoal Creek Blvd., Suite 171-E, Austin, Texas 78757, Telephone: (512) 454-4816, Facsimile: (512) 323-0902, email: mthyssen@advocacyinc.org and Jeff Miller, Advocacy, Inc., 7800 Shoal Creek Blvd., Suite 171-E, Austin, Texas 78757, Telephone: (512) 454-4816, Facsimile: (512) 323-0902, email: jmiller@advocacyinc.org.

MEMBER ORGANIZATIONS: *Statewide Members:* Advocacy, Incorporated, Brain Injury Association of Texas, Coalition of Texans with Disabilities, Epilepsy Coalition of Texas, The Institute for Disability Access/ADAPT, Lone Star Association for Persons in Supported Employment, Mental Health Association in Texas, National Alliance for the Mentally Ill of Texas, National Multiple Sclerosis Society of Texas, Texas Advocates, Texas AIDS Network, Texas Association of Centers for Independent Living, Texas Association of the Deaf, Texas Center for Disability Studies/ Texas Technology Access Project, Texas Council for Developmental Disabilities, Texas Federation of Families for Children's Mental Health, Texas Legal Services Center, Texas Mental Health Consumers, Texas State Independent Living Council, Texas State Sickle Cell Disease Association of America, The Center on Disability and Development at Texas A&M University, Council for Families for Children, United Cerebral Palsy of Texas, The Spina Bifida Association of Texas, Inc., and the Depression and Bipolar Support Alliance of Texas. *Local Members:* Epilepsy Foundation Central & South Texas. REACH Resource Centers on Independent Living – Dallas, Fort Worth and Denton, Corpus Christi Committee for Persons with Disabilities, Goodwill of Central Texas and Coastal Bend Center for Independent Living

Allies: Children's Mental Health Consortium