

# Services

Child-Care Licensing

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**M**ore and more children in Texas under age 6 spend at least part of their day in care outside their homes. With the growth in the number of two-income and single parent households, the availability of affordable child care for working families is an economic necessity. Even more important, the quality of the care our children receive will impact the

future of this state. Recent research has shed new light on children's development and underscored the importance of the first years of life in later intellectual and emotional growth.

Social and economic pressures in recent years have produced changes in the child-care industry and the agencies that regulate it. Since 1985, the number of licensed day-care facilities has increased 19 per-

cent. At the same time, the number of registered family day-care homes has declined. The industry, which has long struggled with low wages and high turnover among workers, has been striving to increase training and professionalism. Parents and community leaders demand stricter enforcement and more monitoring.

PRS' licensing program focuses on two approaches to child-care regulation. The first is education. The department works with the industry to improve the quality of care available, and provides information to parents about choosing care for their children. The other is enforcement. The department inspects regulated facilities to ensure that they meet or exceed the minimum standards established by the Board of Protective and Regulatory Services.

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### Parent Education

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Child care is an important decision for families. A good program can be a wonderful experience for a child, but finding the right facility may require research and careful considera-

tion. In most communities there are a variety of child care alternatives available. The features and quality of individual programs often vary widely.

### Parent Information

Part of the department's role is to help parents understand the choices available to them. The department distributes information in brochures such as "Exploring Child Care Options," "Choosing a Family Day-care Home," and "Choosing a Day-care Center or Group Day-care Home" to thousands of parents through public libraries, employers, and child-care facilities. There have been child-care information booths in malls and schools and at community events throughout the state. Staff and volunteers have provided numerous workshops for parents in collaboration with businesses, universities, and professional child-care associations.

### Child Care Information Hotline

Parents can receive information about child care, and new providers can find out about the licensing process, by calling their

local PRS office. The department also offers a toll-free child care information hotline (1-800-862-5252) to answer questions. In fiscal year 1996, the hotline responded to nearly 4,000 calls from the public.

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## Regulation

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The department sets standards for day-care centers, kindergartens and nursery schools, drop-in care centers, registered family day-care homes, and group day-care homes. PRS regulates residential or 24-hour child-care facilities, licensed foster homes, child-placing agencies, and residential treatment centers. On September 1, 1995, the department became responsible for regulation of maternity homes as well.

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## Enforcement

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During fiscal year 1996, licensing staff made 36,580 inspections of day-care and residential child-care facilities. The department investigates all complaints involving child-care facilities, and in fiscal year 1996 investigated 10,722 complaints.

These resulted in 201 corrective actions. Forty-one facilities were placed on probation and 13 had their licenses suspended. Licenses were revoked for ten facilities and denied for one applicant.

The department investigated 718 complaints of abuse or neglect involving child-care facilities. Twenty-three percent of these were substantiated, resulting in 84 adverse actions.

## Risk Assessment Plan

During fiscal year 1996, the licensing program tested a new method for more aggressive correction of noncompliances that pose a risk to children's safety. The risk assessment plan helps staff to determine what actions to take when a noncompliance has been discovered. Investigators work through a series of decision flow charts based on the actual risk involved in each situation. The result is a decision which may range from immediate revocation of a license for high risk facilities to a corrective action plan for minor violations.

The goal is to make sure that resources are focused on the most serious problems. The risk assessment plan ensures greater uniformity in the enforcement of

standards and allows staff to concentrate on facilities with the poorest safety records. Initial results from test sites have been very positive. The plan will be issued to all licensing staff in fiscal year 1997.

## Registered Family Homes

The department continues to increase monitoring of registered family homes providing child care. All homes are now inspected routinely as part of the application process, again after moves to new locations, and at least once every three years. Homes with a history of non-compliances are inspected more frequently.

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## Standards

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The minimum standards for day-care centers were revised in 1994, after a lengthy review and comment process and considerable public debate. Some provisions became effective June 1, 1995, but because of concern about the impact on providers and the resulting increases in costs for working parents, implementation of several of the most significant changes has been

postponed to allow time for more study. In response to a legislative mandate, the department retained an independent consultant to conduct a comprehensive cost/ benefit study on such changes as reducing the child-to-staff ratio, reducing group size, and requiring 30 square feet of space per child in rooms where children under 18 months are cared for.

### Child-Placing Agencies

In May 1996 the Board adopted revised standards for child-placing agencies. These reflected several new legal provisions enacted during the last legislative session. They include a prohibition against racial discrimination in selecting a potential placement for a child. The revised standards were edited to make them more readable, and guidelines were issued to explain the intent behind each rule.

### Maternity Homes

PRS became responsible for regulation of maternity homes at the beginning of the fiscal year. Standards governing these facilities had not been updated since 1978. The department began

working with providers and advocates to develop more current regulations. Revised minimum standards were adopted by the Board in May 1996.

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### Working with the Community to Improve Child Care

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A major emphasis of the licensing program is to work in collaboration with the community to solve problems by building alliances among people who have an interest in children.

### Child-Care Advisory Councils

PRS works with child-care advisory councils throughout the state to improve the quality of care available for children. These groups developed systems to provide substitute workers to replace temporarily absent staff, provided training, and created mentor programs which pair new or struggling facility directors with established directors.

### Volunteers

Volunteers are a valuable resource for the licensing program. In fiscal year 1996, 753 volunteers contributed over

5,400 hours of service, providing training and licensing orientation, distributing educational materials, serving on advisory boards, and working in administrative offices.

### Registered Family Home Association

The department helped the development of a statewide registered family home provider association and over 125 local associations over the past five years. Members benefit from sharing experiences, training, and professional development.

### Video Training

PRS contracted with the Texas Agricultural Extension Service to develop a video training package for new child-care providers. Caregivers in rural areas will be able to use the package to meet the 8-hour pre-service child-care training requirement.

### Shots Across Texas

PRS has been working with the Texas Department of Health since 1995 as part of the Shots Across Texas immunization initiative. The Health Depart-

ment's local immunization units visit child-care facilities to check that all children in care have the required immunizations. Under a cooperative agreement, licensing staff then follow up with facilities where all children are not fully immunized. This joint effort has

significantly improved compliance with immunization requirements in child-care facilities.

### Community Collaboration

The licensing program works in partnership with communities

throughout the state to improve the quality of child-care and educate parents about child-care options. Here are a few of the many collaborative efforts in 1996:



Corporate Champions for Children programs in Tyler and Fort Worth bring together major employers and community organizations to promote quality, affordable child-care. Groups organized projects for parent education, extended facility hours, and care for sick children. Corporate Champions also provides grants for continuing education and improvement of existing facilities, and maintains an updated list of child-care providers.



In Corpus Christi, 270 parents, child-care providers, and community members attended the 3rd annual Parent Nutrition Training Conference. The event was the result of an ongoing collaboration between PRS and the Texas Health Department, the Texas Workforce Commission, county agencies, and the Driscoll Children's Hospital. Another collaboration, with Texas A&M University-Kingsville, Bee County College, the Regional Education Service Center, and

the Texas A&M Extension Service, resulted in a child-care conference in Kingsville. More than 350 early-childhood caregivers, facility directors, and community members received training.



More than 15,000 people attended the Houston Baby Expo in August. The event was the result of a collaboration with local radio station MIX 96.5, state agencies, and private industry. Sponsors provided information to new parents, answering questions and helping them to find community resources.

New residents in the Houston area receive information about child care from a network of community service providers. Chambers of commerce, “Welcome Wagon” programs, hospitals, and libraries distribute thousands of brochures each month.



The Wichita Falls Area Child Care Advisory Council conducted surveys of parents and child-care providers about how to better serve child-care needs. The council held a training conference for providers in October and is now helping to form a parents’ group.



The Abilene/Brownwood Area Child Care Advisory Council organized a public awareness campaign to promote quality child-care. With the help of a local TV station, the council developed and aired three public service announcements about choosing care. Members also distributed articles on the subject to 30 area newspapers and held a festival in Abilene.



The Dallas Association for Parent Education, Eastfield Community College, and PRS sponsored a one-day training seminar at the community college for 250 child-care providers and parents. Licensing staff also made presentations on “How to Select Child Care” at a similar event called the “Parent University,” sponsored by the Lewisville Independent School District in Denton County.

Staff in San Antonio developed a presentation to inform parents about child-care options. The 45-minute format is ideal for lunch-hour presentations and has been shown on-site at local businesses and child-care facilities. ■

## License or Registration

Licenses are issued by the department to applicants who meet the minimum qualifications and standards for the type of care they seek to provide after a review and on-site inspection. Licensed facilities are monitored periodically to ensure that standards are met.

Registration is a lesser form of regulation. Registrations are issued to providers caring for 4-12 children in their own home if they comply with the requirements, pass an on-site inspection, and attend a 6-hour orientation. State inspections occur once every 3 years.

## Types of Child-care Facilities

### Day care

- ◆ Day care centers provide care for more than 12 children under age 14 for less than 24 hours.
- ◆ Family day care homes, also known as registered family homes, provide care in the caregiver's home for up to six children under age 14, in addition to the caregiver's own children. They may also take in up to six more school-age children after school.
- ◆ Group day care homes provide care for 7-12 children under age 14 for less than 24 hours a day.
- ◆ Kindergartens and nursery schools provide care to children ages 2-7 for four hours a day or less.
- ◆ Drop-in care centers provide occasional care for short time periods.
- ◆ Schools, grades kindergarten and above provide educational programs for children ages 5-13 during the same hours as public schools.

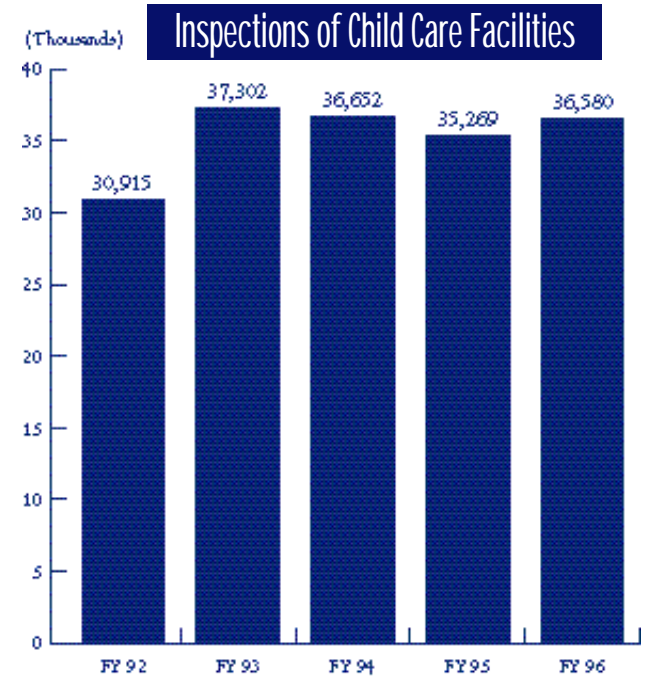
### Residential (licensed 24-hour care)

- ◆ Foster family homes provide care for up to 6 children.
- ◆ Foster group homes provide care for 7-12 children.

- ◆ Emergency shelters provide short-term residential care for children and food, clothing, shelter, and medical services as needed.
- ◆ Child-placing agencies arrange for placement of children in adoption or foster care. Agencies are responsible for assuring that their foster homes meet standards.
- ◆ Institutions providing basic child care provide 24-hour care but do not offer specialized programs such as those at emergency shelters and residential treatment centers.
- ◆ Institutions serving mentally retarded children serve children or adolescents with deficits in intellectual function or adaptive behavior.
- ◆ Residential treatment centers provide care and treatment for emotionally disturbed children and adolescents in an institutional setting.
- ◆ Halfway houses serve as transitional living facilities for no more than 24 children under age 16. They provide therapeutic group living to help children make the transition to living in the community.
- ◆ Therapeutic camps provide special outdoor experience programs for children over age 7 with behavioral problems.
- ◆ Maternity homes provide residential care for 4 or more pregnant women or women who have given birth within two weeks prior to the date of admission.

### Child Care Facilities in Texas End of FY96

	Facilities	Capacity
Day care centers	7,466	626,963
Kindergartens and nursery schools	340	22,636
Schools	86	6,869
Group day care homes	1,668	20,061
Total licensed/certified facilities	9,560	676,529
Registered family homes	12,192	73,152
Total Day Care Facilities	21,752	749,681
Residential child care:		
Agency foster homes	6,853	25,057
Agency group homes	171	1,542
Foster family homes	67	255
Foster group homes	46	536
Emergency shelters	67	1,518
Child-placing agencies	194	n/a
Institutions providing basic care	79	4,868
Institutions serving mentally retarded children	9	418
Residential treatment centers	115	4,750
Halfway houses	4	94
Therapeutic camps	9	402
Total	7,614	39,440
Grand Total	29,366	789,121





## Training and Reorganization

Child-Care Licensing clerical staff received 1,435 hours of training to increase proficiency, including time management, customer service, and automation. Non-clerical staff received more than 13,500 hours of training in such areas as investigation techniques, basic job skills training, customer service, and automation.

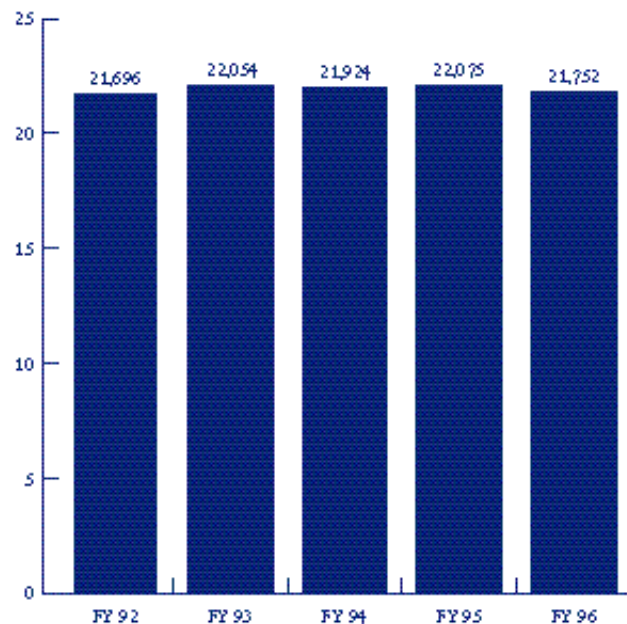
Fifty-one training sessions on minimum standards and 479 registered family home orientations were conducted by licensing staff for 1,505 and

6,281 providers, respectively. In addition, 262 technical assistance classes on special topics were provided by licensing staff to 8,604 child care providers.

Following an agencywide functional review, Child-Care Licensing decentralized. Local operations are run by program administrators who report to the regional director. The small and highly specialized residential child care unit remains centralized under the director of licensing.

### Total Number of Day Care Facilities

(Thousands)



### Total Capacity of Day Care Facilities

(Thousands)

