

Initiatives to Enhance Safety for Texas Children

Background

During fiscal 1998 and 1999, a number of events placed the Child Protective Services Division (CPS) of the Texas Department of Protective and Regulatory Services (PRS) in the legislative spotlight. In an effort to educate Texas leadership to the growing problems facing the agency and the children it serves, Judge Scott McCown released a report in October 1998 calling for action during the legislative session. The report provided a historical analysis of agency data and concluded that PRS' ability to respond to child abuse and neglect has deteriorated because of a lack of resources. In December 1998, PRS published *Child Deaths in Texas and the Nation*, a comprehensive report and analysis of the number of child deaths in Texas due to abuse and neglect during fiscal 1998. The report was commissioned in June, 1998 by Chairman Jon M. Bradley of the PRS Board to determine the underlying causes and to make recommendations for improving the effectiveness of family interventions.

While the agency identified a number of actions that would increase safety for children in Texas, it lacked the resources to implement many of them. With the support of Governor George Bush, the heightened attention placed upon child protection produced positive results in the 76th Legislature.

The Legislature included \$9.0 million in emergency funding for the CPS program in SB 472 that became available in April to begin addressing some of the urgent issues identified across the state. This funding allowed PRS to begin hiring 220 new CPS staff in fiscal 1999 and to increase the amount of purchased services provided for children and families served by the CPS program.

Bipartisan support from the Legislature resulted in appropriations for the 2000–2001 biennium that totaled \$1.345 billion, representing an increase of approximately \$202 million over the last biennium. The number of agency employees was increased by a total of 434 new positions through fiscal 2000 and a total of 437 through fiscal 2001. The CPS program received 380 of those positions specifically for direct delivery positions.

With the additional funding, CPS has made a thorough effort in the past year to improve interventions in child abuse cases. This effort could not have been successful without the support of all PRS staff and the 76th Legislature. The safety of vulnerable children continues to be the highest priority for the agency. PRS remains committed to a comprehensive approach to protecting children, an approach that includes quality casework and effective intervention.

Indicators of Child Safety

Service delivery within the CPS program is provided by local staff in 11 PRS regions and through the use of purchased services. CPS uses a combination of family, community and agency resources to prevent and protect children from further harm. The agency provides a variety of services including intake and investigation of reports of child abuse and neglect; services to families and children in their homes; placement of children in substitute care; development and maintenance of foster and adoptive homes; adoption and post-adoption services and preparation for adult living. Families are provided a mix of these direct and purchased services based on their individual needs and available local resources. All persons receiving CPS services are eligible without regard to income.

Investigations Completed

PRS is entrusted with the responsibility of investigating allegations of abuse and neglect of children by their caretakers. When a report is received that alleges abuse or neglect by a caretaker, CPS immediately notifies appropriate state or local law enforcement to coordinate investigative resources.¹

Child Protective Services caseworkers investigate reports of child abuse or neglect to determine whether abuse or neglect has occurred. In addition, caseworkers assess critical

¹ Texas Family Code, Title 5. The Parent-Child Relationship... Subtitle E. Protection of the Child. Chapter 261. Investigation of Report of Child Abuse or Neglect. Subchapter B. Report of Abuse or Neglect; Immunities.

areas of individual and family functioning to determine whether the child is at risk of abuse or neglect and initiate services for children who need immediate protection.

In fiscal 1999, PRS completed 99,929 CPS investigations of abuse and/or neglect involving 192,135 alleged victims. Of those investigations, 26,265 or 26.3% were confirmed involving 39,488 victims.

Children Receiving Services

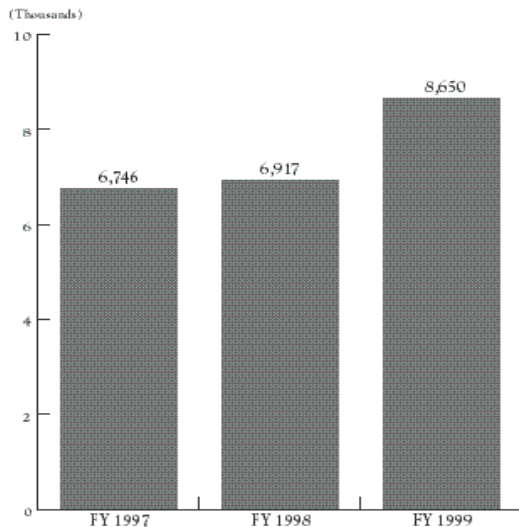
In addition to evaluating the immediate safety of children through investigation, CPS provides services to reduce the risk of future abuse or neglect of children in the home. In fiscal 1999, CPS provided protective services to 91.7% of those children who were determined to be at risk of abuse and/or neglect. Types of services provided include homemaker services, parent/caretaker training, purchased family preservation services, evaluation and treatment services, daycare and substance abuse related services.

Children Removed

Before removing a child from home, CPS must explore reasonable alternatives for keeping the child safe from abuse and neglect. If the family is not able to protect the child, CPS may petition the court to remove the child from the home. The courts may place the child with an appropriate non-custodial parent or relative or allow the Department to place the child with either a foster family or in a residential facility.

As shown in Exhibit 1, in fiscal 1999, Child Protective Services removed 8,650 children from their homes compared to 6,917 in fiscal 1998 and 6,746 in fiscal 1997.

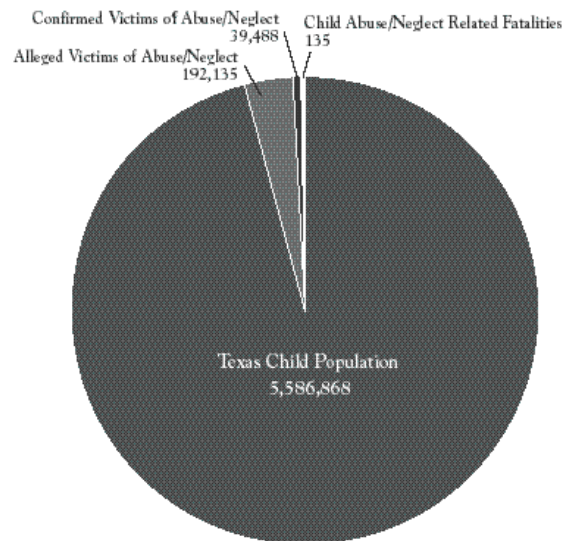
**Exhibit 1:
Number of Children Removed by
Fiscal Year**



Child Abuse/Neglect Related Fatalities

Before fiscal 1998, the number of Texas children confirmed by CPS to have died of abuse or neglect had remained around 100 per year, with a high of 111 in 1993 and a low of 98 in 1995. In fiscal 1997, there were 103 child deaths related to abuse/neglect. In fiscal 1998, the number of deaths that were abuse/neglect related rose to 171.² In fiscal 1999, there were 135 deaths resulting from abuse/neglect.³ This represents a 21% reduction from fiscal 1998 in the number of abuse neglect related deaths. As shown in Exhibit 2, relatively few children die as a result of abuse or neglect when compared to the number of children confirmed as abused or neglected. Additional data regarding child fatalities can be found in this report's appendix.

**Exhibit 2:
Victims of Child Abuse in Texas**



For the past three years, each abuse or neglect death confirmed by CPS has been thoroughly reviewed to determine if CPS had prior involvement with the families of these children before the child died. For a case to be determined to have had prior involvement, there had to be an open case at the time of the child's death or a clear connection to the victim, caregiver or family members associated with a previous case.

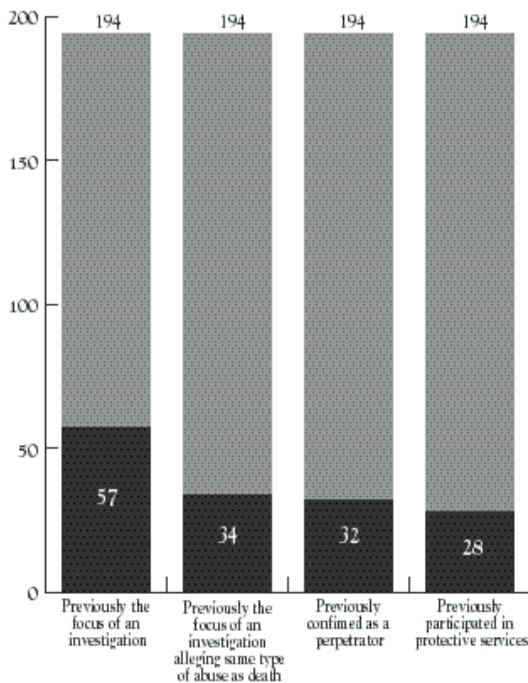
In fiscal 1998, there were 63 children who died from abu

² In fiscal 1998, PRS confirmed the abuse/neglect related deaths of an additional 5 children in ct care or mental health/mental retardation facilities for which PRS has investigatory responsibility.
³ In fiscal 1999, PRS confirmed the abuse/neglect related deaths of an additional 8 children in ct care or mental health/mental retardation facilities for which PRS has investigatory responsibility.

or neglect where there was prior involvement with the agency. In fiscal 1999, there were 58 deaths with prior involvement.

For fiscal 1999, a more in-depth analysis of the fatality cases was conducted to identify the nature of the prior involvement with the victims/perpetrators. Of the 135 child deaths, 33 of the children had previously been the focus of an investigation. Of the 194 perpetrators of the child deaths, 57 were the focus of a previous investigation. Exhibit 3 provides additional information on perpetrators of the child deaths.

**Exhibit 2:
Victims of Child Abuse in Texas
FY 1999**



Agency Initiatives to Enhance Safety for Children

The following summarizes the status of the programs and initiatives that have been implemented as a result of increased funding from the Legislature, as well as the impact those initiatives are having on client services.

Greater Scrutiny of High Risk Cases

To improve assessment during investigation, CPS designed and implemented a risk assessment tool, which incorporates information from previous Texas research, U.S. and Canadian studies and extensive field experience. The tool focuses workers on risk within the family as an integrated whole, rather than risk to an individual family member. The revised risk assessment tool integrates the following concepts: child vulnerability, home environment, caregiver capability, quality of care, social environment, response to CPS and maltreatment pattern.

Staff complete the risk assessment tool when taking a report of alleged abuse, during investigation of the allegations, when a case is closed, during studies of relatives for potential placement and when a child is reunified with a parent.

Provide Additional CPS Purchased Services

For fiscal 2000, PRS allocated an additional \$13.5 million for purchased services. The total amount allocated for purchased services during this year is \$28.8 million. Local contracts for services have been expanded, including, but not limited to homemaker services, purchased family preservation services, evaluation and treatment services, community and parent outreach, parent/caretaker training, daycare, contracted home studies and substance abuse-related services.

Improve Automation

Upgrades to caseworker equipment began in February 2000. Modifications to the automated system will enable PRS to increase efficiency of operations and production of caseworkers, ultimately resulting in improved services to children.

Increase Public Awareness

Protecting children is a shared responsibility of all citizens of Texas. To increase the public awareness, PRS will launch a statewide child abuse prevention campaign in April 2000. This three-year campaign will focus on increased awareness regarding parental responsibility, personal responsibility and community responsibility for the safety of all Texas children.

Staff Resources

The 76th Legislature appropriated funds to maintain the 220 direct delivery positions it had received during emergency appropriations and to hire an additional 160 staff. Hiring these 380 staff has allowed PRS to reduce the caseworker to supervisor ratio and to work towards reducing the number of cases per worker.

PRS has implemented CPS caseworker and supervisor salary upgrades. Effective July 1, 1999, entry level salary for a Child Protective Specialist was raised from \$23,232 to \$27,540 per year. In addition, the annual salary for entry level CPS supervisors was raised from \$31,788 to \$35,100. Certification programs for caseworkers and supervisors were implemented, which link future promotions to education, experience, training, performance and evaluation components.

Conclusion

CPS has made a comprehensive effort in the past year to improve interventions to children in child abuse cases. This effort could not have been successful without the support of all PRS staff and the 76th Legislature. The safety of vulnerable children continues to be the highest priority for the agency. Parental responsibility is the first line of defense for Texas children and through the combined efforts of all involved, Texas can reduce the risk of abuse and neglect to children and develop safer families.

Additional Child Fatality Data

Types of Maltreatment

The primary cause of death for 71 children was abuse related. For 64 children, the primary cause of death was neglect related. For deaths involving physical abuse, 49 out of 71 children or 68%, died as a result of shaking, striking, and/or throwing against a stationary object. See Exhibit 1 for a table showing the types of abusive actions that resulted in child death.

Exhibit 1:
Abusive Action Resulting in Child Death in Fiscal 1999

Children	Abusive Action
49	shaken, struck(beat), and/or thrown
5	maternal drug use related
4	intentional poisoning
4	shot
3	cut/stabbed
3	suffocated by smothering/strangled
1	burned/scalded
2	other
71	TOTAL

In deaths due to neglect, a parent or caregiver failed to protect children from harm. These deaths are most often due to negligent supervision. In fact, 47 or 73% of the neglectful deaths listed negligent supervision as the only confirmed abuse/neglect type. Drowning in a bathtub, pool, creek, pond, etc. accounted for the death of 24 or 38% of the children. Deaths

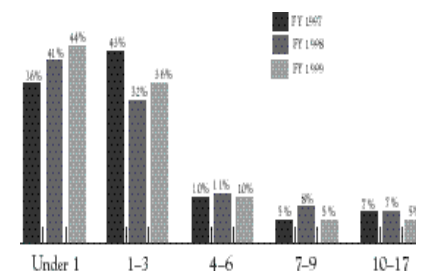
due to medical neglect and physical neglect were also confirmed.

Five children died in house fires resulting from their parents' negligence. The five deaths include one sibling group of three children. See Exhibit 2 for a table showing the types of negligent actions that resulted in child death.

Exhibit 2: Negligent Action Resulting in Child Death in Fiscal 1999

Children	Negligent Action
13	drowning—bathtub
8	strangulation, or suffocation by choking or smothering
6	drowning—pool/Jacuzzi/hot tub
5	drowning—other (lake, bayou bucket, septic tank)
6	motor vehicle crash/run over
6	malnutrition/lack of medical care
5	confinement (motor vehicle, refrigerator, etc.)
5	fire/burn
3	firearm injury
2	poisoning with adult medication
5	other
64	TOTAL

Exhibit 3:
Child Abuse/Neglect Related Fatalities by Age for Fiscal Years 1997-1999 (n=135)



Characteristics of Victims

Age

Because of their absolute dependence on caretakers to keep them safe, very young children face the greatest risk of death from abuse or neglect in comparison to other age groups. In addition to their inability to protect themselves from harm, young children are generally more vulnerable to maltreatment because of a parent's ability to limit access by persons who might report concerns about the child's care.

Forty-four percent of the children who died of abuse or neglect in fiscal 1999 were under one year old. Eighty percent of the children were ages three and under. See exhibit 3 for specific information regarding ages of children who died in fiscal 1999.

Gender

As in previous years, there were more male victims (77) than female (58). These numbers are consistent with national child fatality statistics. See Exhibit 4 for specific information regarding gender of children who died in fiscal 1999.

Ethnicity

Ethnic breakdowns for child fatality victims are shown in Exhibit 5. In fiscal 1999, the largest number of child fatality victims were Anglo. The percentage of Anglo children who died due to abuse or neglect is significantly higher than it was last year. African-American children are somewhat over-represented in the overall numbers of child deaths when compared to the general Texas child populations. Hispanic children have shown a decrease in overall abuse/neglect fatalities since last year.

Family Characteristics

The statistics underscore some dangerous family situations related to child death. Thirteen children were born drug positive, drug-addicted, or with fetal alcohol syndrome; the deaths of six children resulted from the mother's drug or alcohol use.

In 16 instances (11%), the case record revealed that the child had mental, physical, or medical conditions requiring increased care (care beyond what would be expected for a child of that age). For 98 children, there was no indication in the record that increased care was required. For 27 children, the need for increased care was unknown.

Parents, caretakers, or other household members exhibited at least one of the following problems (some households experienced more than one problem):

- History of drug/alcohol abuse
59 households (42%)
- Spouse/partner abuse
56 households (40%)
- Parent abused/neglected as child
53 households (38%)
- Criminal convictions
35 households (25%)

Perpetrators

In fiscal 1999, the 135 abuse and neglect related child fatalities involved 194 perpetrators. Multiple perpetrators were named in the deaths of 53 children. The child's parent was most frequently the perpetrator of fatal abuse or neglect.

Sixty-three percent (123) of the perpetrators were female. Thirty-seven percent (71) were male.

A long-held belief is that fatal abuse and neglect are largely perpetrated by teenage or young single parents living alone. This belief is contradicted by national data, as well as Texas data. The average age of perpetrators at the time of the child's death was 27.92 years of age and the median age was 25.89.

Exhibit 4:
Child Abuse/Neglect Related by
Gender for Fiscal Years 1997-1999
(n=135)

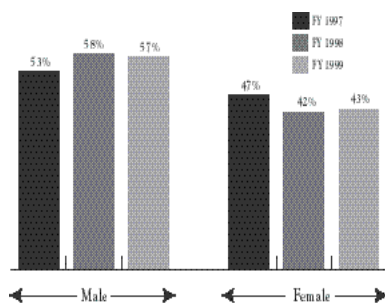


Exhibit 5:
Child Abuse/Neglect Related
Fatalities by Ethnicity for Fiscal Years
1997-1999 (n=135)

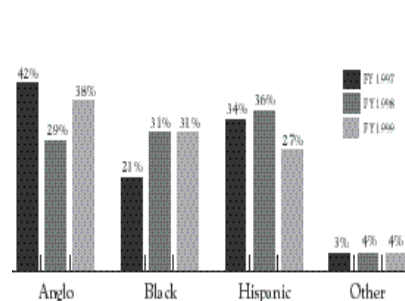


Exhibit 6:
Relationship of Perpetrator to Child
Abuse/Neglect Fatality Victims for
Fiscal Years 1997-1999 (n=194)

