

# PRS Ten Year Retrospective



Somewhere in Texas, a woman sits alone, abandoned by family, weakened by time. Somewhere in Texas, a teenager is encouraged by the words of a volunteer. Somewhere in Texas, a mother entrusts her child to a caregiver who will provide nurturing support. Somewhere in Texas, a child ravaged by abuse chokes back tears of pain and anger.

For the last 10 years, the men and women of the Texas Department of Protective and Regulatory Services have stepped in to free elderly Texans from the anguish of isolation and Texas children from the sting and humiliation of abuse and neglect. Teenagers have been buoyed by community support and parents have realized the virtues of a regulated child care industry. Since 1992, the Texas Department of Protective and Regulatory Services has been protecting the unprotected.

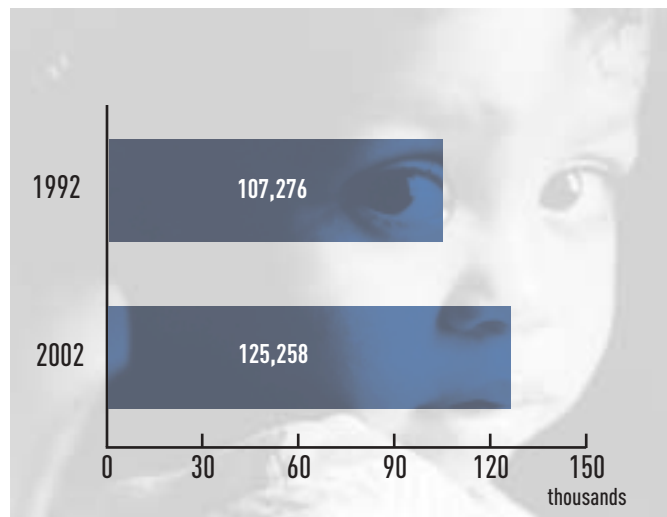
In 1991, the 72nd Texas Legislature was working overtime. It took a complete 140-day session plus two special sessions to deal with issues such as redistricting, education finance, criminal justice, and creation of the state lottery. During the first of those two special sessions, Rep. Jack Vowell of El Paso teamed up with Sen. Chet Brooks of Pasadena to spearhead a restructuring of health and human services in Texas. House Bill 7 not only created the Health and Human Services Commission, it also gave birth to a new agency that would take over Child Protective Services, Adult Protective Services, and Child Care Licensing: the Texas Department of Protective and Regulatory Services.

At its inaugural meeting, September 1, 1992, the significance of the new agency was put into perspective:

“Most of you all remember last session. Even though the primary thrust was toward consolidation, perhaps toward creating fewer entities, one new department was created and that was the Department of Protective and Regulatory Services. That went against the trend, but the governor and members of the legislature believe that the work you do, the work that the people in the field do in the area of protecting people and licensing facilities is important enough and unique enough to put into a department of its own.”

– Pat Cole, Director of Health and Human Services Policy Division, Office of the Governor

The young agency had a number of challenges to overcome. There was no permanent executive director.



Child Protective Services Investigations

The agency lacked infrastructure and depended on the Texas Department of Human Services for technical and informational support. And within six months of its creation, the new agency faced its first legislative session. It was time to PRSS forward, which is what the agency and its staff did.

In its first year, PRS took measures to improve operations and services by introducing a pilot project to centralize the statewide intake of abuse and neglect calls. Preliminary work began on the creation of CAPS, the Child and Adult Protection System. The SMART program was created to give CPS workers a structured approach to assess the risk of child abuse and neglect. Staff worked to increase prevention services and partnerships with outside organizations, including a training initiative with four graduate schools of social work. Foster children aging out of care became exempt from tuition and most fees at state-supported universities, colleges and technical programs.

But along with those advancements came more challenges. In its first year, PRS was thrust into the international spotlight as the tragic siege on the Branch Davidian compound near Waco unfolded. Surviving children were brought into CPS care. In the mid-1990s, foster care reimbursement rates were cut. Funding for the 1994-95 biennium was less than what was necessary to maintain the agency's 1993 level of service. Staff had to maximize efforts

to get \$80 million in federal funds for fiscal year 1995. In 1994, minimum standards for licensed day-care facilities went through their first major revision since 1985.

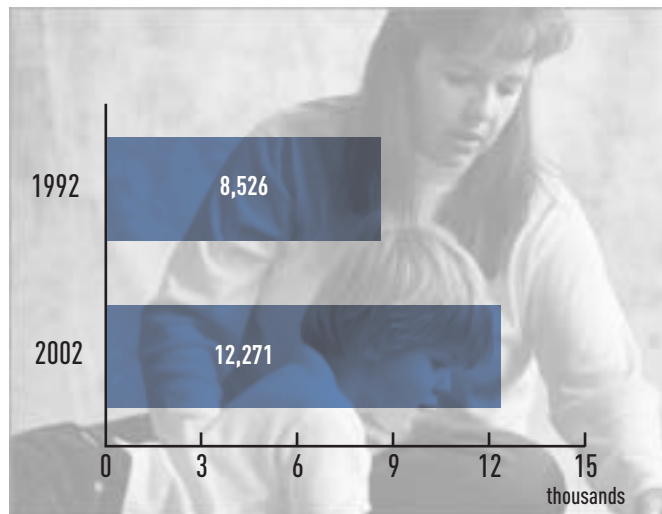
While dealing with these challenges, PRS embraced technology to help advance its mission. In the mid-1990's, CAPS was rolled out to the 11 regions. In 1995, the first PRS web site was launched and Texas became the first state in the nation to have an Internet photo listing of children available for adoption.

Service programs expanded, too. The Community Initiatives division was created and soon became the division of Prevention and Early Intervention. In 1999, the Services to At-Risk Youth (STAR) program expanded to cover all Texas counties.

At the end of fiscal year 1997, the contractor that provided guardianships for the elderly and adults with disabilities declined to renew. As a result, APS assumed a number of guardianships during fiscal year 1998 providing in-house, direct delivery guardianship.

During the late 1990s, the Legislature stepped up its effort to shorten the amount of time abused or neglected children spent in temporary care after being removed from their homes. This permanency planning, coupled with aggressive adoption recruitment and collaborations with the Texas judiciary, resulted in an almost doubling in the number of children adopted between 1996 and 1998.

In fiscal year 1999, APS began a partnership with the Texas Elder Abuse and Maltreatment Institute in Houston. That same year, the program was given responsibility for

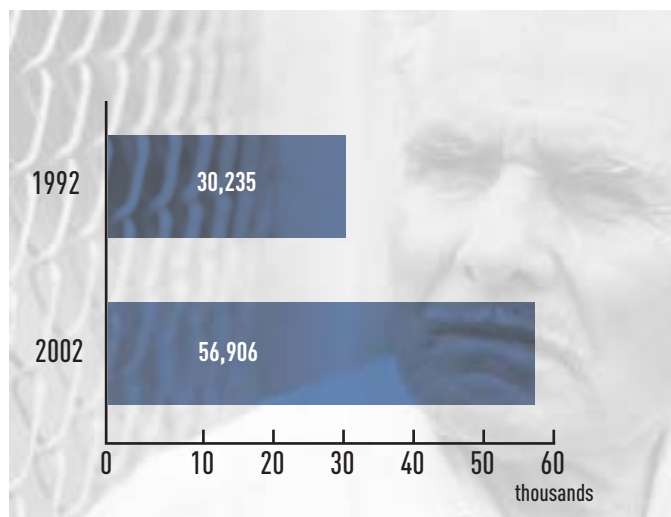


Child Care licensing Complaints Investigations

conducting MHMR home and community-based services waiver program investigations.

But all was not well with PRS in the late 1990s. Texas was facing an increase in the number of child fatalities. In 1998, District Judge F. Scott McCown of Travis County wrote and sent to Texas leadership, "A Petition in Behalf of the Forsaken Children," a report that described how limited resources were preventing CPS from dealing with the growing problem of child abuse and neglect. That report and PRS' proposed response, "Strong Families, Safe Children," inspired action by state lawmakers. The 76th Texas Legislature authorized \$9 million in emergency funding to increase staff and services, \$48.6 million to fund caseload growth, \$23.1 million to help reduce caseload and supervisory ratios, \$29.3 million to increase the rate for foster care providers, and \$4.7 million to upgrade CPS worker salaries. In addition, CPS revised its policies, training, and risk assessment tool to further emphasize child safety. The 77th Texas Legislature went even further, increasing funding to PRS to cover caseload growth needs in CPS, APS, and CCL.

As PRS enters its adolescent years, its services are in demand more than ever. With a growing child population and the graying of the Baby-Boom generation, Texans look to the Texas Department of Protective and Regulatory Services to provide the services that protect the unprotected.



Adult Protective Services Investigations