

TCDD Summary of DARS Exceptional Items Request 84th Legislative Session

Below are the decisions adopted by the 84th Texas Legislature in House Bill (HB) 1 above the base budget for the Department of Assistive and Rehabilitative Services (DARS).

Exceptional Items

1. Early Childhood Intervention (ECI) Projected Service Hours

DARS requested \$14 million in General Revenue (GR)¹ and \$14 million in All Funds (AF)² to fund average monthly service hours of 2.78 in FY 2016 and 2.88 in FY 2017. The ECI program experienced a higher percentage of eligible children with a qualifying diagnosis and a developmental delay in more than one area. DARS reports that HB 1, as introduced, funded projected caseload growth (requested in the fall), but not projected service hour needs.

The full impact of legislative decisions regarding the ECI program is not currently clear.

- The final budget included about \$35 million less in All Funds than the introduced bill.
- \$5.4 million was added to fund an increase to 2.7 service hours per child per month.
- The impact of the therapy rate reduction on the ECI program, though significant, is unknown at this time.

2. Maintain Comprehensive Rehabilitation Services (CRS) Funding

The Comprehensive Rehabilitative Services (CRS) program provides intensive rehabilitation services to people who have experienced a traumatic brain injury or spinal cord injury so they may regain functionality and independence. This \$9.4 million GR request would maintain funding at the FY 2015 level for 143 people in FY 2016 and 41 people in FY 2017.

Adopted

3. Autism Services

This \$7.6 million GR request to address the needs of children with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) by promoting community assessments to identify resources and gaps in services and supports, supporting efforts for universal developmental screenings, providing education and training to parents, and providing training to professionals to increase the capacity of diagnostic intervention providers.

Adopted \$14 million in Article II; \$8.1 million in Article III

- Article II (DARS) - \$14 million for services to approximately 1,856 children
 - Phase-out of comprehensive applied behavior analysis (ABA) services
 - Expand access to focused ABA treatment

¹ General Revenue Funds are state funds. The general revenue fund receives money from the sales tax, the motor vehicle sales and rental taxes, the franchise tax, insurance premium taxes, and various other taxes and fees.

² All Funds are the combination of state general revenue funds, federal funds and other revenue.

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- Article III (Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board) - \$8.1 million to university centers for evidence-based services and training
 - \$4.5M - Parent-directed treatment
 - \$1.9M - Teacher and paraprofessional ABA training
 - \$1.4M - Research, development, and evaluation of innovative autism services
 - \$300K – Administration

4. Invest in Independence and Blindness Prevention

Population growth and an increase in the incidence of conditions that result in the loss of vision are key drivers for this \$5.3 million GR and \$5.4 million AF exceptional item request. Despite increases in staff, the Children’s Blindness Services Program caseloads have increased by 25% since 2009. Demand for the Blindness Education Screening and Treatment (BEST) Program is expanding as well.

Independence and Blindness Prevention	HB 1
Blind Children’s Program (\$1.8M AF)	Adopted
Independent Living - Blind (\$1.3M AF)	Not Funded
BEST expansion (\$2.1M AF)	Not Funded
BEST Eligibility Application (\$0.2M AF)	Not Funded

5. Ensure Communication Access for People

Many organizations do not provide the necessary equipment or services to ensure effective communication for people who are deaf. Approximately 59% of interpreters in Texas are certified at entry level, but most interpreting situations require advanced skills. Only about 136 interpreters certified by DARS are certified for court proceedings. Enhancing the skills of certified interpreters and enhancing oversight of the Specialized Telecommunications Assistance Program (STAP) are vital to ensure availability. This \$1.6 million GR and \$2.1 million AF request would:

Communication Access	HB 1
Deafness resource specialists (\$1.0M AF)	Adopted
STAP - Enhance oversight	Adopted
Board of Interpreters Registry (\$1.1M AF)	Not Funded
Interpreter certification tests (\$0.4M AF)	Not Funded

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6. Reduce the Independent Living – General Waiting List

The Independent Living program provides services to eligible Texans with significant disabilities, including veterans, with support to improve their ability to function independently in their home and the community. Most requests involve the purchase of assistive technologies and devices. This \$2.5 million GR request would have provided independent living services and/or needed assistive technologies to **178 people in FY 2016 and 250 people in FY 2017**. **Adopted \$1.3 million to provide services to 178 people in FY '16 and 250 people in FY '17.**

7. Reduce the Comprehensive Rehabilitation Services (CRS) Waiting List

CRS provides intensive rehabilitation services to people who have experienced a traumatic brain injury or spinal cord injury so they may regain functionality and independence. This \$4.7 million GR request would fund CRS for **46 people** in FY 2016 and FY 2017. **Adopted \$836K in GR to provide services to 16 people on the waiting list per fiscal year.**

8. Rider 2 – Capital Budget Request

This \$0.1 million GR and \$3.9 million AF request is for 3 projects that would fund:

- ReHab Works electronic case management system to address federal and state mandates (\$3M AF) – **Not Funded**
- Texas Review, Oversight, and Coaching System (TxROCS), an electronic case management system to monitor Vocational Rehabilitation (VR) – **Not Funded**
- Criss Cole Rehabilitation Center improvements – **Interagency contract with Texas Workforce Commission (TWC)**

Additional Conference Committee Actions

Sunset and appropriations decisions move DARS VR programs to the TWC. The legislature also added an additional \$4.1 million in general revenue to replace VR funds moved to the TWC that previously paid for deaf and hard of hearing services, field support for smaller programs, and 33 workers.