

Background:

The Public Policy Committee is responsible for recommending Public Policy Priorities to the Council before the beginning of each legislative session. TCDD's Public Policy Priorities provide guidance to staff regarding advocacy activities during legislative sessions and with state agencies. Staff will review draft TCDD Public Policy Priorities with the Public Policy Committee. Additional information is provided in meeting materials.

Public Policy Committee**Agenda Item 7.****Expected Action:**

The Committee will recommend TCDD Public Policy Priorities for Council approval and provide additional guidance as appropriate.

Council Meeting**Agenda Item 17.****Expected Action:**

The Council will consider TCDD Public Policy Priorities as recommended by the Public Policy Committee and determine final action.

Proposed TCDD 2011 Public Policy Priorities

Draft

Appropriations - *Maintain publicly-funded services and supports for people with disabilities and ensure that critical services and supports for Children and Families, Education, Employment, Housing, Long Term Care, Mental Health, and Transportation are not reduced or limited in order to balance the state's budget.*

The state of Texas faces a budget shortfall that is estimated to be as high as \$18 billion for the upcoming 2012-2013 biennium. Due to the budgetary outlook, the state could reduce existing services or programs to balance budgets, look for alternative ways of providing services in order to reduce spending, or consider additional sources of revenue. The Legislature is encouraged to exercise considerable caution when exploring alternative ways of providing services recognizing that some options may also have serious negative consequences to those most needing assistance.

Children and Families - *Increase the availability of family and community supports that assist children with developmental disabilities to live and remain in their home communities.*

The absence of community resources results in children being placed outside their home and community, separation from family, lack of educational continuity and a fractured social support system. Many children are placed in facilities such as residential treatment centers, foster care settings, nursing facilities, hospitals, juvenile detention, state supported living centers, HCS homes and state hospitals due to the lack of resources in their home communities. All children belong in families that provide love, caring, nurturing, bonding and a sense of belonging and permanence that best enables them to grow, develop and thrive.

Education - *Protect the right of students with disabilities to appropriate, inclusive, publicly-funded education that supports opportunities for full participation and eliminates the use of inappropriate disciplinary alternatives throughout the educational spectrum- from early education programs to post-secondary schooling.*

Students with disabilities require individualized supports tailored to meet their needs in order to be educated along side their peers without disabilities. An appropriate public school education for students with disabilities should include the necessary array and intensity of services for children with all levels of need, beginning in early education programs and should lead to employment, enrollment in postsecondary education, or both within one year of leaving high school. Education supports for students with disabilities must also address the behavioral health needs of students in order to prevent inappropriate disciplinary referrals in lieu of proper behavior management.

Employment - *Improve the system of employment services and income supports for individuals with developmental disabilities, including programs that help individuals develop assets and resources and help students with disabilities transition from school to work.*

People with disabilities want the same opportunities to have meaningful jobs and careers as do all other working age individuals. In June 2010, 21.7% of working age people with disabilities were in the labor force compared to 70.5% of working age people with no disability. Employment services and preparation for work needs to begin in public education. A sound foundation from school will help students transition to post secondary education and a career path after graduation.

Working for independence, productivity and community inclusion.

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Adopted by the Texas Council for Developmental Disabilities, November 2010

Housing - *Expand dedicated funds for housing assistance for people with disabilities and increase the availability of affordable, accessible housing.*

A shortage of affordable housing is one of the most significant obstacles facing people with disabilities. The primary barrier to acquiring safe and adequate housing is income - people with disabilities have lower incomes on average compared with the general population. Housing that is defined as “affordable” in state policy is not priced at a level that people living on Supplemental Security Income (SSI) can afford. Texans with developmental disabilities also face barriers to housing because of a lack of physical accessibility, lack of public transportation options and inability to access supportive services that are often critical to living independently in the community.

Long Term Services and Supports - *Improve the system of long-term services and supports to ensure the availability of quality community-based services and supports for individuals with developmental disabilities and emphasize providing services in integrated, community settings thereby reducing reliance on institutional services.*

People with disabilities continue to wait years for the community-based long term services and supports they need. Services for both adults and children are not adequate to meet the growing demand. Simultaneously, programs struggle to provide quality services to individuals with complex medical and behavioral health needs. As a result, people with disabilities are forced to either forego care or receive it in a more restrictive, institutional setting. The state has struggled to expand community based services while continuing to fund costly institutional services and their needed improvements.

Mental Health - *Expand community-based behavioral, mental health and substance abuse services and supports for children and adults that are recovery-oriented and consumer-based and link mental and physical health needs.*

Access to care is one of the most critical issues affecting the public mental health system in Texas. Due to the system’s lack of capacity, individuals with mental illnesses cannot easily access needed mental health services in a timely manner. Some Texans with severe and persistent mental illnesses who experience a mental health crisis cannot or will not engage in ongoing care. These individuals cycle through crisis services, hospitals, jails, and prisons and may never get linked into clinics or other outpatient treatment. A severe shortage of specialists creates a significant barrier to accessing mental health care. Children with disabilities or behavioral challenges need positive behavior supports to be successful at school and in the community. Some children need professional mental health care, but in Texas, less than 1 in 5 Texas children with a serious behavioral problem that puts them at risk of removal from their home or school receives the treatment they need.

Transportation - *Expand and ensure full accessibility of public transportation in suburban, urban, rural and unincorporated areas to connect the places people live with the places they work, shop, socialize, worship, attend school, and have access to health care.*

Without access to transportation, people with disabilities are isolated from gainful employment, schools, doctors, shopping, friends and community. Texas transportation systems need to be accessible in all areas of the state, particularly in rural parts of Texas. As economic pressures build and federal funding remains static, communities have not been able to expand or develop the transportation services to adequately meet the needs of individuals with disabilities. State funding for transportation services (bus systems, paratransit services, commuter rail services, etc.) is a critical element needed to support the growth of transportation systems throughout the state. Where transportation services do exist, they often struggle to be responsive to consumer needs.

Every person in America has the right to live in their own home, work at a regular job, seek an education and interact socially. This includes the 437,885 people with developmental disabilities in the state of Texas.