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Senate Workgroup on Child Protection Announces Plan for More CPS Investigators, Higher Caseworker Pay

Chairman Schwertner says Child Protective Services (CPS) must conduct initial child welfare checks more quickly and make a high priority of reducing caseworker turnover

AUSTIN, TX -- Today, the Senate Workgroup on Child Protection reported its initial funding recommendations for the Department of Family and Protective Services (DFPS), following a thorough evaluation of a critical needs funding request by DFPS Commissioner Hank Whitman.

"Ensuring the safety and protection of our state's most vulnerable children is one of the Texas Legislature's most important responsibilities," said Workgroup on Child Protection Chairman Charles Schwertner (R-Georgetown). "We owe it to the children of Texas to get this right."

The plan recommends providing CPS with 100 additional child abuse and neglect investigators and 36 support staff to help the agency make initial contact with high-risk children more quickly.

"These additional front-line investigators will help ensure that children at the highest risk of abuse are contacted by CPS within hours or days, not weeks or months," said Schwertner.

To improve retention and reduce caseloads, the plan also recommends a salary increase of up to \$12,000 per year for all CPS caseworkers, as well as a separate salary increase for supervisors.

"Every member of this workgroup appreciates the difficult work done by our dedicated CPS employees, and we are hopeful that the enhanced compensation plan we've recommended today will serve to improve morale, reduce the unacceptable level of caseworker turnover, and bring much needed stability to Child Protective Services," Schwertner continued.

In addition to Senator Schwertner, Senators Brian Birdwell (R-Granbury), Lois Kolkhorst (R-Brenham), Kirk Watson (D-Austin), and John Whitmire (D-Houston) were also named to the Senate Workgroup on Child Protection. The recommendations will now be considered by Senate Finance Chair Jane Nelson (R-Flower Mound) and the members of the Legislative Budget Board (LBB) before a final funding plan is agreed upon.

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Additional details from the Senate Workgroup on Child Protection's funding plan are below:

- \$75.3 million All Funds / \$67.6 million General Revenue for remainder of FY 2017
- \$12,000/year salary increase for all front-line CPS caseworkers (Investigations, Conservatorship, Family Based Safety Services), based on longevity
- 20% annual salary increase for supervisors of front-line caseworkers
- 50 additional Investigative Caseworkers, 50 Special Investigators, and support personnel
- 20% annual salary increase for Special Investigators
- 10-15% salary increase for Program Directors, Program Administrators, and other Supervisors including Kinship and Foster Care/Adoption

As a condition of funding, the Department of Family and Protective Services will be required to:

- Provide a weekly report to the Senate Finance Committee until June 1, 2017 on the timeliness of Priority 1 (P1) and Priority 2 (P2) face-to-face contacts by region
- Provide a weekly report to the Senate Finance Committee on the number of P1 intakes, by region, without face-to-face contact for over 24 hours, over 48 hours, and over 96 hours
- By March 1, 2017, ensure all regions contact 90% of children in P1 cases within 24 hours
- By June 1, 2017, ensure all regions contact 95% of children in P1 cases within 24 hours
- Provide a monthly report to the Senate Finance Committee on employee retention rates by stage of service and job description
- Conduct exit surveys of staff who leave the agency beginning on January 1, 2017 to determine reason for leaving and what impact salary increases had on job satisfaction
- By June 1, 2017, ensure completion of new supervisor training for all new and existing CPS supervisors

A medical doctor by training, Dr. Schwertner currently serves as Chairman of the Senate Committee on Health and Human Services. Schwertner is currently serving his second term as the senator for Senate District 5, a ten-county region of central and east Texas.

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