

Testimony  
Texas Sunset Commission Advisory Committee

Senator Jane Nelson Chair

Mike Foster, LCPAA, LCAA

[mfoster@pathway.org](mailto:mfoster@pathway.org)

Investing in Trauma Informed Care for  
Children/Youth and Families Makes Sense  
Don't Delay

The Sunset Commission suggested and the Stephen Group report stated that trauma informed care initiatives be halted. That would be a mistake. Trauma Informed Care holds our best hope for real change in a broken system. Don't delay its implementation.

We know that children suffering from trauma who are not healed will likely have a loss of productivity over their lifespans and public systems, such as healthcare, child welfare, social services, law enforcement, criminal justice, and education, will carry the long-term burden of these costs. The greatest tragedy is that they will parent as they were parented and create another generation of abused and traumatized children for the state to raise and we have not been good parents.

Trauma Informed Care is the critical strategy to improve safety, wellbeing and permanency outcomes for children/youth and their families. It is the most effective treatment modality and the most efficient service delivery system. Its efficacy is being proven around the country and in Texas. The return on investment will be profound and the outcomes are sustainable. TIC connects children to safe, healthy relationships that last a lifetime.

All across the country deeper end service systems, like substance abuse, mental health, juvenile justice and child welfare have gradually moved to embrace trauma informed services.

We have passed a number of bills over the last two legislative sessions recognizing the importance of TIC in improving DFPS's services to children and families. Do not retreat from this modest beginning. We have to shift the culture to shift the system.

Scientists and researchers in the last several decades have made great strides in understanding the impact of trauma on the developing brain. Early experiences, whether adverse or positive, have a profound impact on lifelong wellbeing.

Trauma informed care is grounded in a thorough understanding of the neurological, biological, psychological, developmental and social effects of trauma and the prevalence of these experiences in children and youth who enter our child welfare system.

TIC acknowledges trauma and assesses its impact on children and families. It provides a path to recovery, resiliency and lifelong healing. This knowledge is incorporated into all aspects of service delivery at every stage of service.

We recognize that traditional service approaches label and pathologize kids and are focused on what's wrong with them and often retraumatize kids and family members. There is now a term, *System Induced Trauma* to describe the damage done by the lack of stability, competency and the disrupted relationships inherent in our current models of care. We have disempowered and devalued youth and families long enough.

TIC in its most simple form provides a new perspective where those providing care shift from asking "What is wrong with you?" to "What has happened to you?" Trauma informed services are specifically designed to avoid retraumatization.

TIC is a holistic centered response focused on improving an individuals' all around wellbeing, recovery and healing rather than simply providing "treatment".

Healing only happens in safe, stable and healthy relationships.

DFPS and its services will best be served by changing from the ground up. Redesign is shuffling contracting mechanisms and positive outcomes are far in the future if we rely on those processes.

The surest and most effective way to positively change our outcomes is to infuse everything we do with trauma informed care.

Highly traumatized children and youth need highly trained and supported primary caregivers.

The best hope for change lays in the hands of primary caregivers, birth parents, kinship, foster and adopt parents, teachers and front line staff who have become highly skilled practitioners of trauma informed care and are supported with adequate funding and resources like genuine wrap around services, so they can effectively bring healing and lifelong connections to our kids and families.

Trauma-informed care will impact all aspects of service delivery and how services are provided.

Becoming trauma-informed means a grass roots transformation in the way that providers meet the needs of those they serve. The ideas above are only a beginning.

Real and lasting change will happen when DFPS, stakeholders, organizations and providers take these ideas and use them in community based initiatives like the TCU Institute of Child Development and TBRI Based Travis County Collaborative for Children. The Travis CCC is a multi-year, multimillion dollar collaboration with the goal that when a child enters the child welfare system in Travis County whoever touches that child's life will be trained in the TBRI *Trust Based Relational Intervention* model of trauma informed care.

We confidently await improved outcomes for children and families.