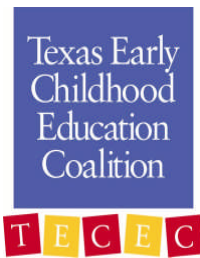


Testimony of:

Kara Johnson  
Executive Director  
Texas Early Childhood Education Coalition  
(TECEC)



Before the:

Committee on Public Health

House Bill 620

Tuesday, March 10, 2009

Good morning. My name is Kara Johnson and I am the Executive Director of the Texas Early Childhood Education Coalition (TECEC). TECEC represents more than 275 organizations and thousands of members from across the great state of Texas. Our partners include representatives from public schools, Head Start, child care, the business community, higher education, foundations, community based organizations, and more. I would like to begin my remarks by thanking Chair Kolkhorst and the entire House Committee on Public Health for hearing my testimony.

The purpose of my remarks today is to speak in support of House Bill 620, which would create a Children's Behavioral Health Council in order to provide a coordinated, comprehensive, interagency approach to the development and delivery of behavioral health services to children. This legislation is of particular interest to members of the Texas Early Childhood Education Coalition (TECEC) because of the number of children that display challenging behaviors in child care, Head Start, and pre-k settings.

Did you know that two thirds of child care providers in Texas report caring for young children with a behavioral or emotional difficulty, leading to these children being removed from care? In addition, did you know that children in the public school pre-k program are expelled at twice the rate of children in K-12?

The failure to appropriately respond to the challenging behaviors can result in these children being retained in school and/or entering more restrictive and costly programs (i.e. alternative education, mental health, or juvenile justice systems). Early childhood behavioral consultation is a proven method for keeping children

in early childhood education programs through technical assistance, screenings/assessments, parent education, resource and referral, and training.

Why are children showing up to early childhood programs with these types of behaviors? Children are carrying with them the psychological pressures associated with neighborhood violence, child abuse and neglect, parental mental illness and substance abuse, as well as the early onset of biological based affective disorders.

House Bill 620 would ensure representatives of each of the major agencies in Texas were working together to meet the needs of young children with behavioral challenges, an issue very important to the Texas Early Childhood Education Coalition (TECEC). This is why we are in complete support of the passage of House Bill 620.

On behalf of the Texas Early Childhood Education Coalition, thank you, and I am happy to answer any questions.