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TESTIMONY 2013
S.B. 1356

Dear Members of the Committee,

Thank you for allowing me this opportunity to present testimony in favor of S.B. 1356, an effective bill that will help heal the invisible wounds of traumatized youth in the Texas juvenile justice system. S.B. 1356 is an important step in breaking the cycle of trauma, incarceration, and crime for Texas children, and the Texas Criminal Justice Coalition strongly urges you to support the bill.

SPECIALIZED TRAINING WILL GIVE STAFF THE SKILLS NEEDED TO WORK WITH TRAUMATIZED KIDS

Traumatic events – including violence, neglect, abuse, threats, humiliation, and deprivation – have wreaked havoc on the development of many youth in the Texas juvenile justice system. Trauma in childhood often causes a youth's stress response to be over-reactive and dysfunctional, leading many youth to delinquent behavior. Sadly, after a child has entered the juvenile justice system, past trauma continues to push the youth into deeper system involvement. Texas should implement a fully trauma-informed juvenile justice system, starting with specialized training for staff to respond to the unique vulnerabilities of traumatized youth.

KEY FINDINGS

- **Unaddressed trauma is placing enormous strain on the juvenile justice system and the youth in its care.**
 - » In Texas, over half of the youth referred to the juvenile justice system have previously experienced a significant traumatic event, such as violence, neglect, abuse, threats, humiliation, or deprivation.¹
 - » Recent research in Texas has confirmed the observations of practitioners and advocates that **a youth's past experience with trauma is the largest predictor** of the youth's assignment to increasingly serious secure placements.²
- **Texas' juvenile justice system is not adequately addressing the unique risks and needs of traumatized youth.**
 - » Fifty percent of girls surveyed at the Ron Jackson state secure facility said that their experiences in county probation were either not helpful or did more harm than good in helping them to deal with past trauma.³
 - » Trauma counseling is available to some youth in state secure facilities, but few local juvenile justice programs are currently able to offer sufficient support for traumatized youth.⁴

COST-SAVING AND PUBLIC SAFETY-DRIVEN SOLUTION: SUPPORT S.B. 1356 BY SENATOR VAN DE PUTTE

- **S.B. 1356 requires staff who work with youth in the juvenile justice system to receive specialized training in trauma-informed care.** This training will equip staff with the specialized skills they need to work successfully with kids who have experienced past traumatic events. When staff are trained to respond appropriately to the unique vulnerabilities and triggers of traumatized youth, they are able to build a sustainable positive environment that increases safety for youth and staff. A trauma-informed juvenile justice system will help protect public safety by improving interventions to help heal these youth and get them on a path to success.

References on reverse

References

¹ Texas Criminal Justice Coalition (TCJC), review of calendar year 2011 data provided by the Texas Juvenile Justice Department (TJJD), (April 2012).

² E. Espinosa, "An Evaluation of the Influence of Gender and Mental Health Needs on Juvenile Justice System Processing," (2011).

³ TCJC, "Girls' Experiences in the Texas Juvenile Justice System," (October 2012).

⁴ TJJD Program Registry. Conversations with county departments revealed insufficient resources for trauma programs.