



HON. JOHN J. SPECIA JR. (Ret.)
Jurist in Residence

March 7, 2011

Dear Texas Judges:

There are serious budget deficits facing our state for the next biennium. What you may not know is that there is also a budget crisis that will affect the remainder of the 2011 fiscal year as well. Consequently, the Department of Family and Protective Services Commissioner, Anne Heiligenstein, has had to make some very difficult decisions with regard to CPS services for families. Contracted services such as parenting classes, home studies, supervised visitation, and protective home maker are being eliminated. This information was likely communicated to you by your local Regional Director. To avoid having caseworkers bear the full brunt of the extra work these cuts will entail, DFPS is re-assigning regional administrative and state office staff to perform some of these duties such as home studies. DFPS regional staff is canvassing community resources to find free parenting classes within local communities and caseworkers will return to supervising visitation in those counties where it was being done by contract. The cuts to the contracts are effective April 1, 2011, with no new services being authorized after March 1, 2011.

DFPS is facing even more draconian cuts to its 2012 - 2013 budget, including the possibility of eliminating all future adoption subsidies, which will mean fewer adoptions. The proposed budget also eliminates the Relative Caregiver Program and doesn't provide funds for caseload growth, which we know is a given. These cuts are real and the full extent will not be known until the end of the legislative session. The tough budget times are only beginning, and I would encourage each of you to contact your DFPS Regional Director or Colleen McCall, the CPS Director of Field, at 512-438-3309 or colleen.mccall@dfps.state.tx.us to discuss possible solutions for the cuts to contracted services or for longer term solutions.

If you have a relationship with your local state representative or state senator it is important to help educate them on the impact of the proposed cuts on the children and families in your community. Please refer to the attached three documents - a letter from DFPS Commissioner Heiligenstein detailing the service constraints that will result from the budget shortfall and two papers by the Center for Public Policy Priorities that provide data illustrating the local and statewide impact of HB 1 and SB 1. It will be essential for judges to provide leadership in the development of additional resources today and in the future to minimize the impact of these significant cuts in staff and resources. There are difficult discussions ahead as we work together to serve children and families in an environment where staff and resources are severely rationed. Once the legislative session is over, the Children's Commission will convene a meeting of judges, DFPS executives, and service providers to discuss how best to spend the money we have and where.

Sincerely,



John J. Specia Jr.
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Enclosures