

Brief: What Texas Pays to Harm Its Children, and What It Gains by Stopping

For Commissioner Andrew C. Brown, J.D., and Jeramy D. Kitchen · L. Brooks McKenzie, PhD · **WORKING DRAFT** (data requests pending) · Oct. 16, 2026 · Prices the [TCMF research report](#) · Author's commercial interests disclosed in report section 12

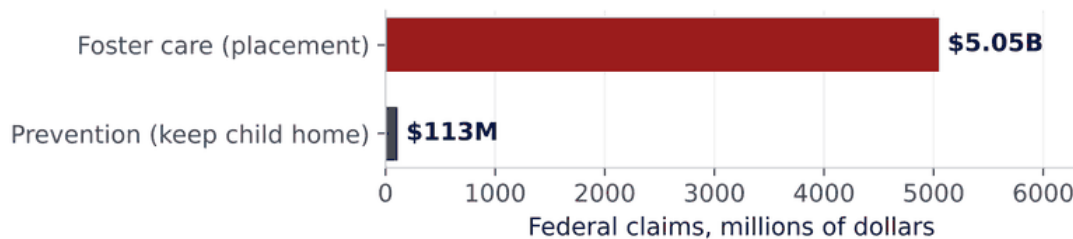
The finding

Texas's federal funding pays for removal and enforcement, not for keeping families whole, and Texas children carry the cost.

RECORD Federal foster care money runs about **45 to 1** toward placement over prevention. **DOCUMENTED**

Source: ASPE (Feb. 2026), Title IV-E claims FY2023

Federal IV-E money: \$45 for placement for every \$1 for prevention



Source: ASPE, Feb. 2026 (Title IV-E claims FY2023).

Figure. About \$45 for removal for every \$1 to keep a child safely home.

RECORD About **\$1.15 billion a year** in federal money (IV-D, IV-E, and the TANF grant tied to IV-D) depends on the current structure. **DOCUMENTED**

Source: OCSS FY2024; Children's Bureau FY2023; Comptroller FY2024

What happens to children

CASE A federal court found Texas foster care a system where "rape, abuse, psychotropic medication, and instability are the norm." **DOCUMENTED**

Source: M.D. v. Abbott (S.D. Tex. 2015)

RECORD Children in five state juvenile facilities were "not reasonably safe" from sexual abuse by staff and other youth; about 1 in 6 reported sexual victimization at two of them. **DOCUMENTED**

Source: U.S. Department of Justice, TJJJ findings (Aug. 1, 2024)

RESEARCH Maltreatment runs 8 times higher for children living with one parent and an unmarried partner than with married parents (a risk marker, not proof of cause). Abuse and neglect raise the odds of depression and suicide attempts 1.5 to 3.4 times and raise crime about 15 points. **DOCUMENTED**

Source: NIS-4 (2010); Norman et al. (2012); Currie & Tekin (2012); Fang et al. (2012)

The Texas bill: DFPS confirmed 51,985 victims in FY2025. Their lifetime costs: **\$16.9 billion, \$3.1 billion** of it on taxpayers. **INFERENCE**

What two reforms return

Due process before removal and **equal parenting time as the default for fit parents**. Equal parenting draws on causal evidence (random judge assignment in Sweden, Canessa et al. 2026; a 5-million-child sibling design, Johnston, Jones & Pope 2025). The LBB found no significant State cost for either lead bill (H.B. 803, H.B. 567, 87R).

Table: What the reforms return (model results, with ranges).

	Result
Children spared abuse or neglect	about 1,240 a year (830 to 1,830; upper bound)
Lifetime value for children reached in 20 years, 3%	about \$110 billion (\$72B to \$163B)
Texas budget gain at maturity, reforms within federal law	about \$686 million a year (\$517M to \$905M)
Same, if Texas also declines IV-D and IV-E	total gain \$1.05B, about \$100M a year short (1 in 4 chance to break even); includes fewer courts and judicial pensions
Added federal taxes at maturity	\$567 million to \$1.26 billion a year

The honest limit. The reforms pay; declining the federal money, on today's evidence, falls just short.

ACTION

The asks. (1) Commission: adopt due-process removal and the equal-parenting presumption as lead recommendations. (2) TPPF and TPR: review the open model. (3) Recommend court outcome reporting by parent. (4) Price the federal choice openly. (5) Require targeted outcome metrics and longitudinal studies of the courts and every child program.