

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

A financial cost-benefit report on due-process removal, equal parenting, and the federal funding structure of Texas child protection and child support

Prepared for the Texas Commission on Marriage and Family and, for its November 6, 2026 meeting, the Supreme Court of Texas Children's Commission

WORKING DRAFT · L. Brooks McKenzie, PhD · Draft 1 · October 16, 2026 · Texas records requests and data requests pending

How to read this report. Color at the left edge tells you where each statement comes from: LAW (constitutions and statutes), CASE (court decisions), RULE (agency rules and policy), RECORD (government records and data), RESEARCH (studies and analyses, with peer-review status and limits stated). Each estimate carries a tag: **DOCUMENTED** means read in a primary source; **INFERENCE** means our projection from documented inputs; **PENDING** means awaiting a primary source or records-request data. Dollars are 2026 dollars unless stated. Ranges are 10th to 90th percentiles of 20,000 Monte Carlo draws. This report prices the recommendations of the TCMF research report, *The Best Interest of the Child* (Oct. 8, 2026), which sets out the evidence and the law in full.

Key points. (1) Federal foster care money runs about 45 to 1 toward placement over prevention, and about \$1.15 billion a year in federal money is tied to removal and enforcement. (2) Each year's 51,985 confirmed Texas victims of abuse and neglect carry about \$16.9 billion in lifetime costs, \$3.1 billion on taxpayers. (3) Due-process removal and equal parenting spare about 1,240 children a year (an upper-bound estimate) and carry a lifetime value of about \$110 billion (\$72 billion to \$163 billion) for the children reached over the next 20 years, most of it in health and quality of life. (4) Made within federal law, the reforms return about \$686 million a year to the Texas budget at maturity (\$517 million to \$905 million) at no significant State cost, including fewer foster placements, fewer courts, and fewer lifetime judicial pensions. Declining the \$1.15 billion in federal money as well would leave Texas about \$100 million a year short at maturity, with about a 1 in 4 chance of breaking even.

Foreword (signed opinion of the author)

I write this foreword in my own name, as a citizen, a father, and a scholar of child attachment. What follows is my judgment. The report after it rests only on evidence.

Texas Family Courts are to the child as Planned Parenthood is to the unborn. Both are institutions that profess to serve the vulnerable while presiding over their harm, and both are sustained by public money.

I call what the record shows State Sanctioned Child Abuse. A federal judge found that Texas foster children move through a system where “rape, abuse, psychotropic medication, and instability are the norm.” The U.S. Department of Justice found that children in five state juvenile facilities were not reasonably safe from sexual abuse. The federal government’s own incidence study found that children living with one parent and that parent’s unmarried partner suffer maltreatment at more than eight times the rate of children raised by their married parents, a risk marker the study does not attribute to any one cause. The money that sustains these systems flows when children are removed and when parents are placed under enforcement, and almost none of it flows to keep a family whole.

The pages that follow do not ask the reader to share my faith or my anger. They ask only that the reader follow the evidence and the dollars. Where they lead, I believe, is the duty of a faithful steward: to stop paying for the harm of children and to start protecting them. I do not believe this harm is an accident. A system that is paid more when it removes a child, and paid almost nothing when it keeps a family whole, will remove children, and those who built it and keep it can read the same numbers this report reads.

L. Brooks McKenzie, PhD

Faith preface (marked). “But whoso shall offend one of these little ones which believe in me, it were better for him that a millstone were hanged about his neck, and that he were drowned in the depth of the sea.” Matthew 18:6 (KJV). “Moreover it is required in stewards, that a man be found faithful.” 1 Corinthians 4:2 (KJV). “The women of my people have ye cast out from their pleasant houses; from their children have ye taken away my glory for ever.” Micah 2:9 (KJV).

1. Bottom line

Texas spends billions on harms that its own systems, the evidence suggests, help cause, and federal money pays it to keep doing so. Each year’s confirmed victims of child abuse and neglect in Texas carry about \$16.9 billion in lifetime costs, \$3.1 billion of it borne by taxpayers. INFERENCE

Two reforms change the arithmetic. Requiring due process before the State removes a child, and making equal parenting time the default for fit parents, would, under the model’s stated assumptions:

- spare about **1,240 children a year** from abuse or neglect (range 830 to 1,830), an upper-bound estimate that counts years of risk; INFERENCE
- carry a lifetime value of **about \$110 billion** (range \$72 billion to \$163 billion, 3% present value) for the Texas children reached over the next 20 years: \$19 billion in higher adult earnings and the rest in health and quality of life; counting only abuse and neglect prevented, the floor is \$14 billion; INFERENCE
- at maturity, return **about \$686 million a year** to the Texas budget (\$517 million to \$905 million) if made within federal law; if Texas also declined the \$1.15 billion a year in federal child support and child welfare money, the total gain of about \$1.05 billion

(\$869 million to \$1.28 billion) would fall about \$100 million short, with about a 1 in 4 chance of breaking even. **INFERENCE**

The honest limit. The reforms pay; declining the federal money, on today's evidence, does not. Made within federal law, the reforms save Texas money at no significant State cost (LBB). Declining IV-D and IV-E as well is a choice of principle that costs Texas about \$100 million a year at maturity on the central estimate, because the largest return (state and local taxes on children's adult earnings) builds from about year 17 and reaches full size only decades out. Society-wide gains begin in the first year, through foster care and litigation savings. The nation gains too: Washington saves on SNAP and Medicaid and, at maturity, collects \$567 million to \$1.26 billion a year more in federal taxes.

ACTION

What we ask. (1) That the Commission adopt the due-process removal standard and the equal-parenting presumption as its lead recommendations. (2) That TPPF and Texas Policy Research review this model independently; every input and line of code is available. (3) That the Commission recommend court-level outcome reporting by parent, so the next estimate uses Texas records instead of national studies. (4) That the Legislature price the federal choice openly: keep the money and seek waivers, or decline it and keep Texas law Texan. (5) That the Commission recommend targeted outcome metrics and longitudinal studies so Texas can measure, for the first time, whether its courts and every program meant to protect children actually do (section 11).

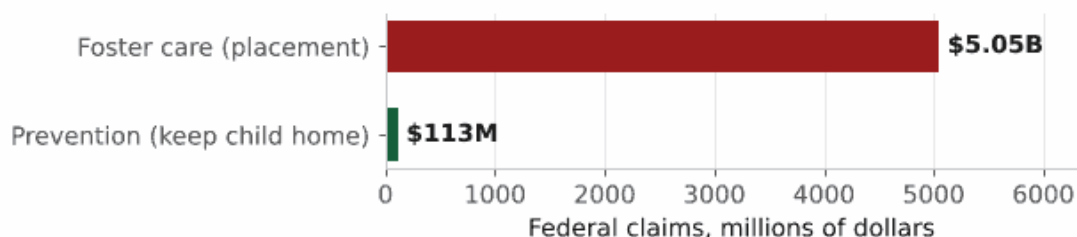
2. State-funded child abuse: Texas has traded children for federal funds

Finding. Texas built its child protection and child support systems around federal money that pays when a child is removed or a parent is placed under enforcement, and pays almost nothing to keep a family together.

RECORD Federal foster care reimbursement ran about **45 to 1** toward placement over prevention: \$5.05 billion for foster care (53.4% of claims) against \$112.7 million for prevention (1.19%). **DOCUMENTED**

Source: Oberlander, Allen & Benton, ASPE (Feb. 2026), federal government report, 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. For every federal dollar Washington paid to keep a child safely home, it paid about \$45 to place a child in foster care. The red bar is removal; the thin green sliver is prevention.

RECORD About **\$573 million a year** reaches Texas because orders are entered and children are placed: a \$97.1 million federal IV-D incentive (FY2022), 66% federal match on \$457.7 million of IV-D administration (about \$302 million, FY2024), and \$174.3 million in IV-E foster care reimbursement (FY2023). Counting the TANF grant, which depends on running IV-D, about **\$1.15 billion a year** is tied to the structure. DOCUMENTED

Source: OCSS FY2024 preliminary tables; Children's Bureau FY2023 IV-E claims; Texas Comptroller federal schedule FY2024

LAW The TANF plan must certify that the State "will operate a child support enforcement program"; IV-D failures cut the \$484.7 million grant by 1 to 5%. DOCUMENTED

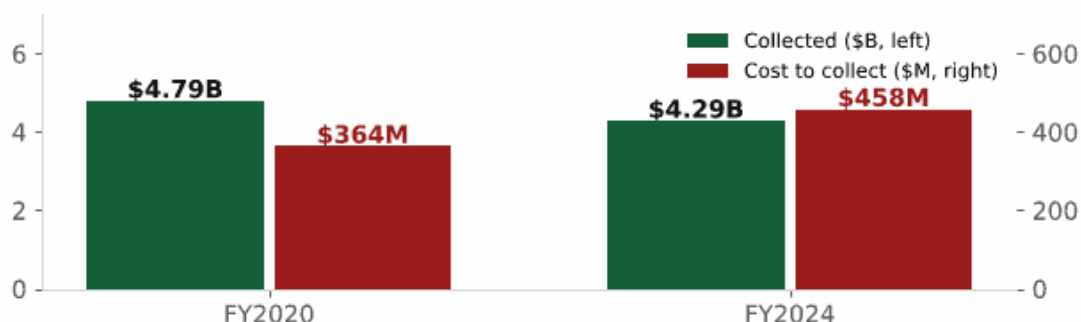
Source: 42 U.S.C. §§ 602(a)(2), 609(a)(8)

The connections that are rarely drawn.

Connection 1: The State's own enforcement feeds its own foster care demand. A one-time \$1,000 tax benefit to low-income families cut CPS referrals 3% and foster care days 7% (Rittenhouse 2025, regression discontinuity). Money added to a family lowers CPS use. Texas keeps all but \$75 a month of support paid for families on assistance (CBPP 2024), and orders above ability to pay cut fathers' earnings \$148 to \$206 per \$1,000 of debt in the first year (Cancian, Heinrich & Chung 2013). By the same mechanism, money taken from a household by enforcement would be expected to raise CPS risk, so the State may be paying to remove children its own collections put at risk. DOCUMENTED effects; mechanism INFERENCE; Texas data PENDING

Connection 2: Texas collects less and spends more each year. Collections fell from \$4.794 billion (FY2020) to \$4.285 billion (FY2024) while administrative cost rose from \$363.6 million to \$457.7 million; cost per dollar collected rose 41%. Contempt jailing costs about \$70 more per case and collects no more (MDRC PJAC random assignment, 2023); license suspension shows no link to payment (IRP 2025). DOCUMENTED

Texas child support: collecting less, spending more



Source: OCSS FY2024 preliminary data tables (P-4, P-43).

Figure. Between FY2020 and FY2024, Texas collected about half a billion dollars less child support while its cost of collecting rose by nearly \$100 million. Green is money reaching children; red is the cost of the machinery.

Connection 3: TANF money mostly pays for foster care. Of Texas's TANF funds, \$406.5 million went to DFPS in FY2024. If due process and prevention shrink the number of children in care, the federal dollars lost were paying for care Texas would no longer provide. DOCUMENTED

Connection 4: Many foster youth are later incarcerated, and the juvenile lockups where DOJ found sexual abuse hold children with heavy needs. Over 30% of foster youth in the national youth outcomes survey were incarcerated by age 17 (Janczewski, Mersky & Kaiser 2025), and about 65% of TJJD youth have significant mental health needs (TJJD 2021). These are descriptive figures, not proof that removal causes incarceration. DOCUMENTED, descriptive

Connection 5: Return is not repair. Of children who left DFPS custody five years earlier, 47.9% were later alleged victims in a new investigation (DFPS open data, CPS 2.10). DOCUMENTED

What the record does not show. No document read shows that Texas designed its courts or CPS to earn federal money, and this report does not claim it. The incentive structure is documented; intent is not. No source read calls any of the payments fraud.

3. What happens to children in State hands

CASE After a yearlong trial, Judge Janis Graham Jack held that Texas exposed foster children to an "unreasonable risk of harm," wrote that "Texas's foster care system is broken, and it has been that way for decades," and found children moving through a system where "rape, abuse, psychotropic medication, and instability are the norm." The State has been held in contempt twice. DOCUMENTED

Source: M.D. v. Abbott, No. 2:11-cv-84 (S.D. Tex. 2015), aff'd in part (5th Cir.)

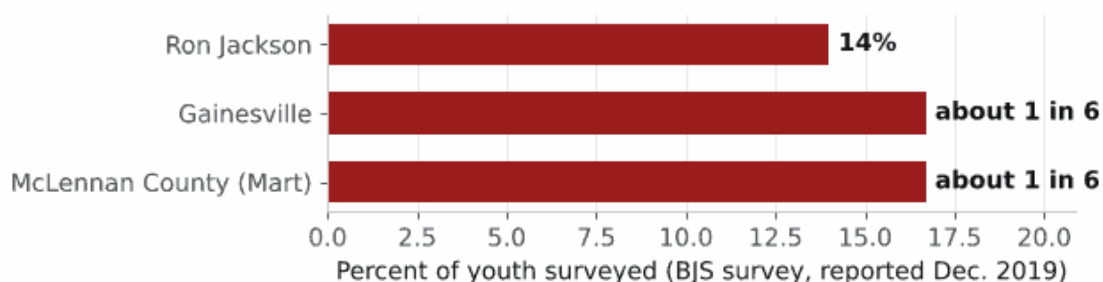
RECORD A quarter of children DFPS identified as sexual abuse victims were victimized or revictimized after entering foster care. The lawsuit has cost Texas \$298.6 million in related costs, including \$78.1 million in monitor fees (Sept. 2019 to Aug. 2025). DOCUMENTED

Source: M.D. v. Abbott court monitors, June 2022 report (via Texas Tribune, Feb. 9, 2023); DFPS rider report, Nov. 2025

RECORD At Evins, Gainesville, Giddings, Mart, and Ron Jackson, children were “not reasonably safe” from sexual abuse by staff and other youth, in a “pervasive atmosphere” of sexual abuse and grooming. About 1 in 6 youth at Gainesville and Mart, and 14% at Ron Jackson, reported sexual victimization. A staff member solicited a child for sexual conduct after turning off his body camera more than a dozen times; another was indicted for offenses including indecency with a child; investigators sustained a finding that a boy forced sexual acts on another. 63% of audited staff turned off body cameras. Children spent 17 to 22 hours a day alone in cells, and 22 to 24 in the security unit. **DOCUMENTED**

Source: U.S. Department of Justice, Civil Rights Division, Investigation of the Texas Juvenile Justice Department (Aug. 1, 2024)

Youth reporting sexual victimization in State juvenile facilities



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

Figure. In three of the State’s own juvenile facilities, one youth in six or seven reported being sexually victimized. These are children in State custody.

Texas pays \$770.53 a day for each secure TJJD bed, about \$281,000 a year (FY2024, LBB), to hold children in these conditions. **DOCUMENTED**

4. Abuse, neglect, and deprivation across a lifetime

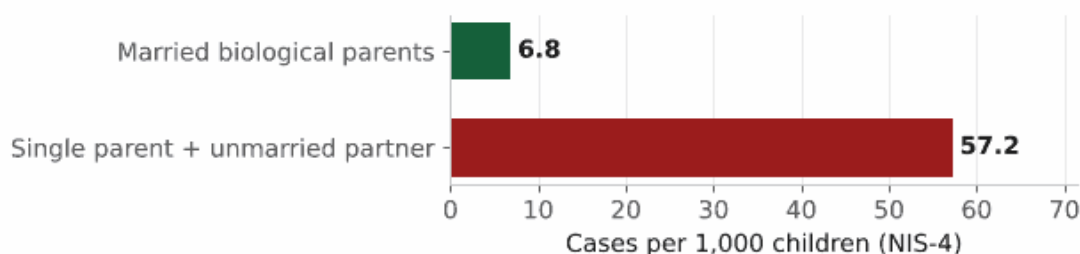
Whether a child’s harm begins in a divorce or a CPS case, the injury the research measures is maltreatment: abuse, neglect, and deprivation.

RECORD All maltreatment: 6.8 per 1,000 children living with married biological parents against 57.2 per 1,000 with a single parent and an unmarried partner, more than 8 times higher; abuse more than 10 times; neglect nearly 8 times. Sexual abuse: 0.5 against 9.9 per 1,000, about 20 times; the gap between a single parent with no partner (2.4) and one with a partner (9.9) is statistically marginal. The study does not identify the perpetrator, and poverty, addiction, and mental illness travel with the risk: a risk marker, not proof of cause.

VERIFIED

Source: Sedlak et al., Fourth National Incidence Study of Child Abuse and Neglect (NIS-4), Report to Congress (HHS, Jan. 2010), pp. 5-19 to 5-22 (Harm Standard)

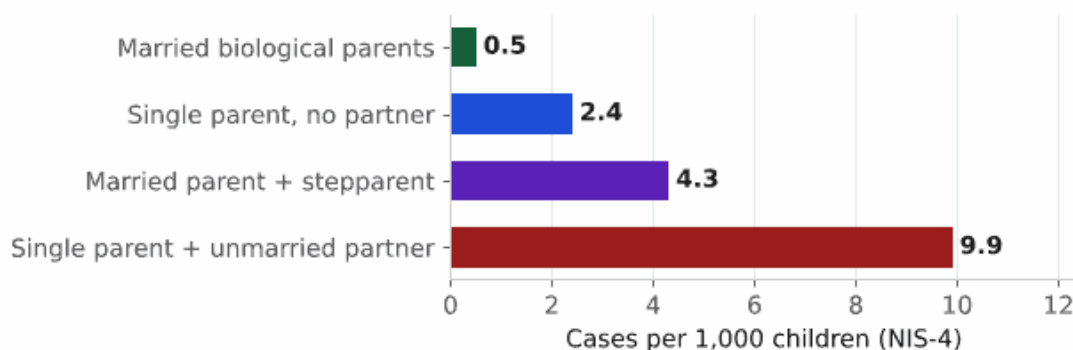
All abuse and neglect per 1,000 children: more than 8 times higher



Source: NIS-4 Report to Congress (2010), p. 5-19. Poverty, addiction, and mental illness travel with this risk.

Figure. A child living with a married mother and father is the safest; a child living with one parent and that parent's unmarried partner faces more than eight times the rate of abuse and neglect.

Child sexual abuse by household: about 20 times higher



Source: Sedlak et al., NIS-4 Report to Congress (2010), pp. 5-19 to 5-22. Risk marker, not proof of cause.

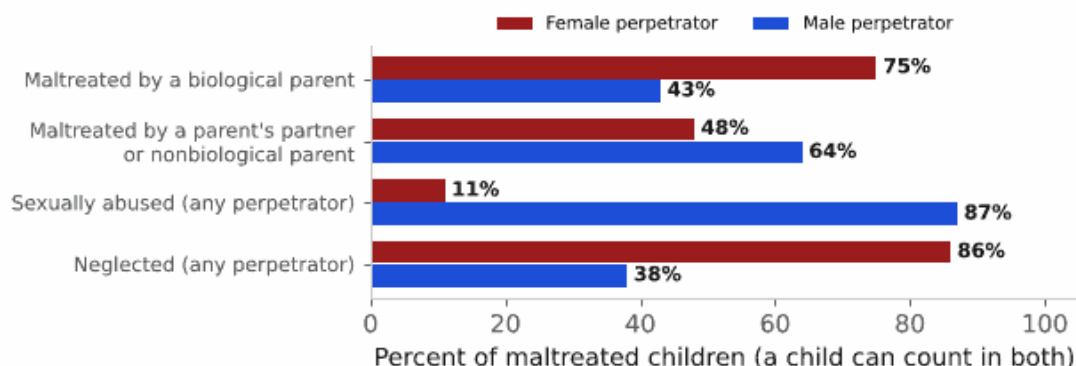
Figure. Sexual abuse rises from 0.5 to 9.9 per 1,000 children, about twenty times, as the household moves from married biological parents to a parent with an unmarried partner. The study does not identify the abuser.

What the household averages hide: the sex of the parent. The federal study groups all single parents together, so its single-parent rates mix mother-only and father-only homes, and 77% of children in single-parent homes nationally (83% in Texas) live with their mother (NSCH 2023-2025, weighted). Two sources separate them.

RECORD Of children maltreated by a biological parent, 75% were maltreated by the mother and 43% by the father (a child can count in both). Of children maltreated by a parent's partner or nonbiological parent, 64% had a male perpetrator and 48% a female. Sexual abuse: 87% male perpetrators. Neglect: 86% female. The study notes that mothers are more often the primary caretakers and are held accountable for failures of care, so these shares partly reflect time with the child. **VERIFIED**

Source: Sedlak et al., NIS-4 Report to Congress (2010), p. 14 and Table 6-3, p. 6-7

Who maltreats: the federal incidence study by sex of perpetrator



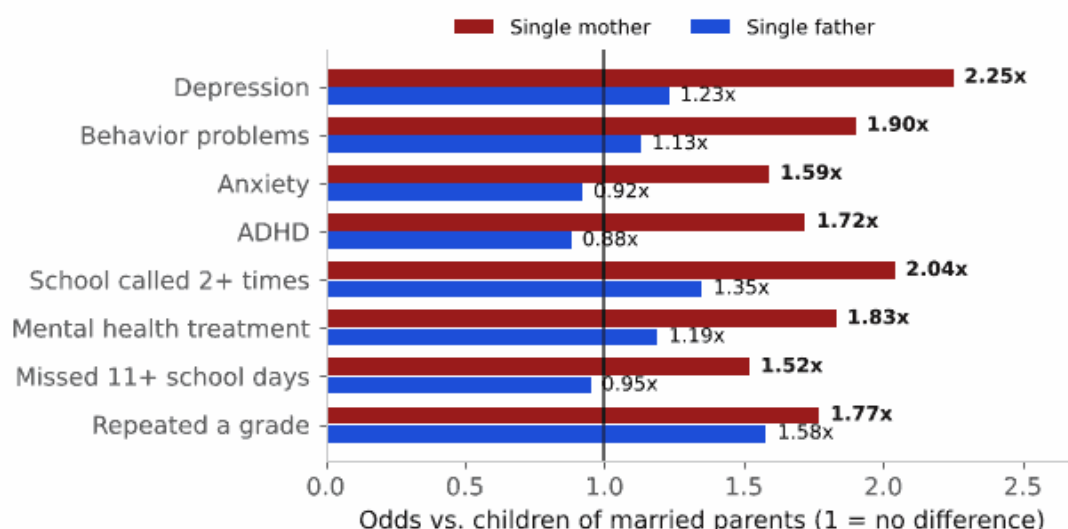
Source: NIS-4 Report to Congress (2010), pp. 14 and 6-7 (Table 6-3), Harm Standard.

Figure. When a biological parent maltreats a child, it is the mother in 75% of cases and the father in 43%; mothers dominate neglect, while male partners and other men dominate sexual abuse.

RESEARCH Compared with children of married parents, children of single mothers had 1.5 to 2.3 times the odds of depression, behavior problems, anxiety, ADHD, repeated school calls, mental health treatment, missed school, and grade repetition. Children of single fathers were close to children of married parents on most of these (0.88 to 1.35), with grade repetition (1.58) the main exception. {DOCUMENTED analysis; correlational}

Source: TCMF analysis (not peer-reviewed), National Survey of Children's Health 2023-2025 (U.S.)

Single mothers vs. single fathers: same structure, different results



Source: TCMF analysis, NSCH 2023-2025, U.S.; adjusted for age, sex, and poverty (first five also parent education and survey year). Correlational.

Figure. On nearly every outcome, children of single fathers look like children of married parents, while children of single mothers carry 1.5 to 2.3 times the odds of harm.

What this shows, and its limit. Treating “single parent” as one category hides a large difference by the sex of the parent. In the national survey, the disadvantage is far larger in mother-only homes; children of single fathers are close to children of married parents on most outcomes, though still higher on depression (1.23), school calls (1.35), mental health treatment (1.19), and grade repetition (1.58). The federal perpetrator shares reflect who does the caretaking and are not rates by household type. Neither source gives a maltreatment rate per 1,000 children for mother-only and father-only homes separately, and fathers who gain sole custody may differ from other fathers, so the comparison is correlational. It is the comparison the published summaries do not make, and it supports giving children both parents rather than presuming one.

Who harms children, and what a mother-default custody system misses. Custody debates are often framed around protecting women from violent men. The federal data on children point somewhere else. In the national incidence study, when a biological parent maltreated a child, the mother was involved 75% of the time and the father 43%. Neglect, the most common form of maltreatment, had a female perpetrator 86% of the time. The newest federal child protection data say the same. In FFY 2023, 51.6% of perpetrators nationally were women (50.1% in Texas); 37.2% of victims were maltreated by a mother acting alone and another 5.5% by a mother with a nonparent, against 24.6% by a father alone and 1.1% by a father with a nonparent. Among children killed by maltreatment, 39.6% died at the hands of a mother alone or a mother with a nonparent, against 15.8% for a father alone or a father with a nonparent: about 2.5 times as many. Men dominate sexual abuse (87% of perpetrators); when a parent’s partner or other nonbiological parent maltreated a child, the perpetrator was male 64% of the

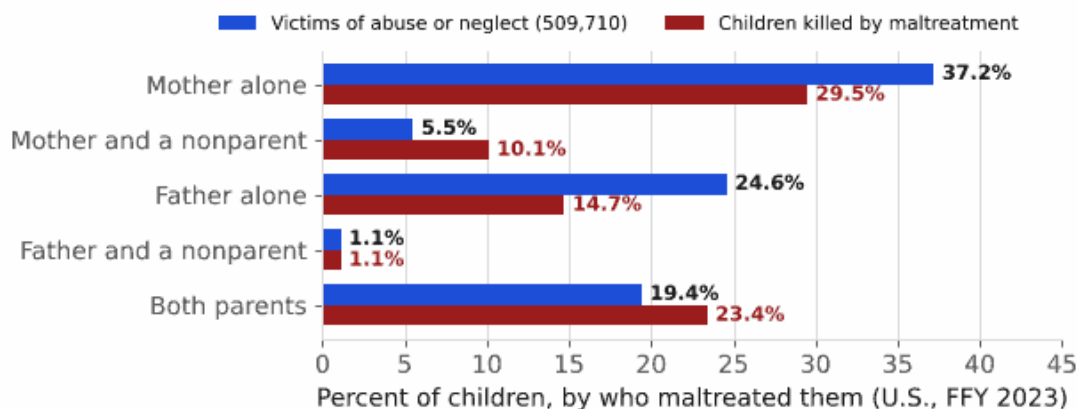
time; and the household with the highest sexual-abuse rate, 9.9 per 1,000, is a single parent living with an unmarried partner. **DOCUMENTED**

Put those facts together. Between 77% and 83% of children in single-parent homes live with their mother, so a system that defaults custody to mothers places most children of separated parents with the parent who is most often the perpetrator of neglect, and, when she repartners, in the household type with the highest rates of both abuse and sexual abuse. Equal parenting time does three things at once: it shares the caretaking that the perpetrator shares follow, it keeps a second protective parent in the child's week, and it keeps the biological father, rather than an unrelated partner, in the father's place. Children of single fathers already look like children of married parents on most outcomes. **INFERENCE**

RECORD Victims by perpetrator: mother alone 37.2%, mother and nonparent 5.5%, father alone 24.6%, father and nonparent 1.1%, both parents 19.4% (49 states; a child can count more than once). Fatalities: mother alone 29.5%, mother and nonparent 10.1%, father alone 14.7%, father and nonparent 1.1%, both parents 23.4%. Perpetrators by sex: 51.6% women nationally; Texas 20,939 women and 20,654 men. **VERIFIED**

Source: U.S. HHS Children's Bureau, Child Maltreatment 2023 (2025), Tables 3-9, 4-4, and 5-3

Who maltreats and kills children: mothers without fathers lead



Source: HHS Children's Bureau, Child Maltreatment 2023, Tables 3-9 (49 states) and 4-4. A child can count in more than one row.

Figure. For every child maltreated by a father acting alone or with a nonparent, about 1.7 were maltreated by a mother acting alone or with a nonparent; among children killed, about 2.5. Blue is all victims; red is children killed.

The limit, stated plainly: these perpetrator shares follow caretaking time, as NIS-4 itself notes, so they do not show that a mother is more dangerous per hour than a father. What they show is that a custody rule that concentrates caretaking in one parent concentrates the risk with it, and that protecting women from violence and protecting children from abuse are not the same question. A rule written only for the first will miss most of the second.

RESEARCH Odds of depression: 1.54 after physical abuse, 3.06 after emotional abuse, 2.11 after neglect. Suicide attempts: 3.40, 3.37, 1.95. Drug use: 1.92, 1.41, 1.36. The authors found the evidence “suggests a causal relationship” with mental disorders. **DOCUMENTED**

Source: Norman et al. (2012), PLoS Medicine 9(11), meta-analysis

RESEARCH Comparing twins raised in the same home, abuse raised the probability of non-drug crime by 14.7 points against a 10.9% base; sexual abuse about 33 points; failure to meet basic needs about 15. Abused children also had lower grades, more grade repetition, and more suspensions. **DOCUMENTED**

Source: Currie & Tekin (2012), J. Human Resources (NBER w12171), twin fixed effects

RESEARCH Court-substantiated victims followed to age 41 were 14 points less likely to be employed; neglect lowered adult earnings about \$7,005 a year (2003 to 2004 dollars). **DOCUMENTED**

Source: Currie & Widom (2010), Child Maltreatment 15(2)

RESEARCH Children moved from institutions to foster families gained in IQ, and gained most when placed early and kept in one stable home, which shows that deprivation itself does lasting damage. **DOCUMENTED**

Source: Bucharest Early Intervention Project (Fox, Nelson et al.), randomized trial

RESEARCH Lifetime cost per nonfatal victim: \$210,012 (2010 dollars): productivity \$144,360, childhood health care \$32,648, adult medical \$10,530, special education \$7,999, child welfare \$7,728, criminal justice \$6,747. With lost quality of life: \$830,928 (2015 dollars). **DOCUMENTED**

Source: Fang, Brown, Florence & Mercy (2012), Child Abuse & Neglect 36; Peterson, Florence & Klevens (2018), Child Abuse & Neglect 86

The Texas bill. DFPS confirmed 51,985 victims in FY2025 out of 222,267 alleged (data.texas.gov v63e-6dss). In 2026 dollars, each year’s confirmed victims carry:

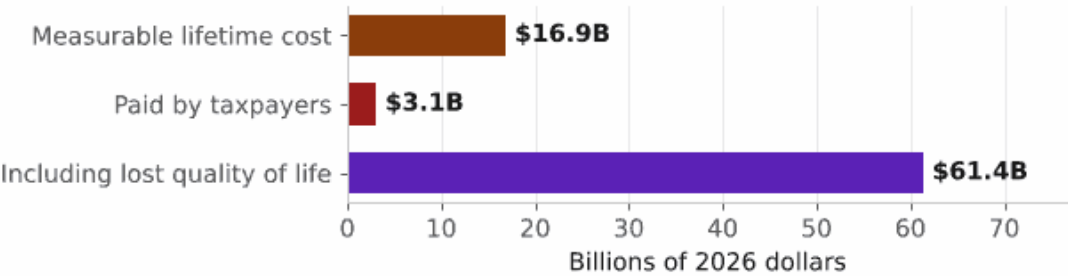
Table: The lifetime bill for one year’s victims. Each row prices the 51,985 children DFPS confirmed as abused or neglected in FY2025. The first row counts only measurable costs (lost work, health care, special education, child welfare, criminal justice); the second is the part taxpayers pay; the third adds the value of lost quality of life. Read across: cost per child, then cost for all of them.

Measure	Per victim	Texas, one year’s victims
Measurable lifetime cost (Fang)	about \$324,500	\$16.9 billion
Share falling on taxpayers (child welfare, justice, special education, half of childhood	about \$60,000	\$3.1 billion

Measure	Per victim	Texas, one year's victims
health care)		
Including lost quality of life (Peterson)	about \$1.18 million	\$61.4 billion

Confirmed victims are a floor, because confirmation requires a preponderance finding. Inflation uses the BLS CPI-U, all items (1982-84=100): 2010 = 218.056, 2015 = 237.017, September 2026 = 336.940 (latest published, Oct. 14, 2026).

Lifetime cost of one year's 51,985 confirmed Texas victims



Sources: DFPS FY2025 confirmed victims; Fang et al. (2012); Peterson et al. (2018).

Figure. One year’s confirmed victims in Texas will cost \$16.9 billion over their lifetimes in measurable costs, \$3.1 billion of it from taxpayers, and \$61.4 billion when lost quality of life is counted.

In children today (U.S., with Texas where the sample allows). Our analysis of the 2023 to 2025 National Survey of Children’s Health (151,676 children; survey-weighted logistic regression controlling for age, sex, and poverty) found:

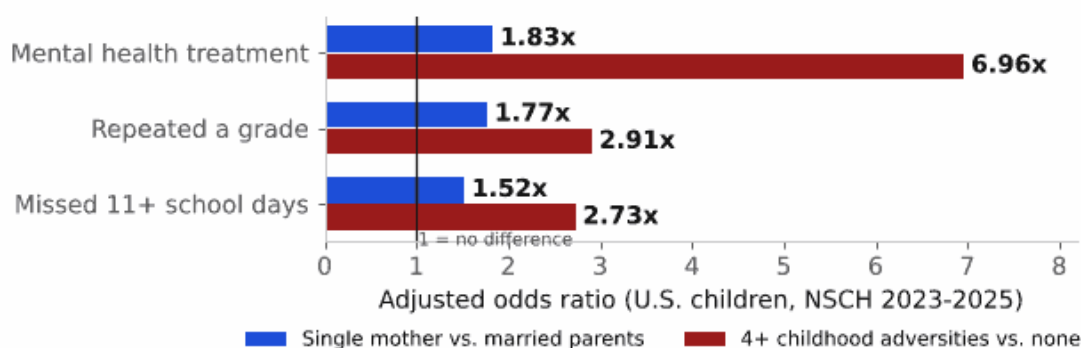
Table: How much more likely harm is. Each number is an adjusted odds ratio: 1.0 means no difference; 2.0 means about twice the odds. The middle columns compare children of single mothers with children of married parents, and children with four or more adversities with children who had none, after removing the effect of age, sex, and household poverty. The last column gives the Texas result where the Texas sample was large enough.

Outcome	Children of single mothers vs. married parents (U.S.)	Children with 4+ adversities vs. none (U.S.)	Texas
Mental health treatment past year	1.83 (1.75 to 1.92)	6.96 (6.52 to 7.44)	4+ adversities: 6.30 (3.43 to 11.56)
Repeated a grade	1.77 (1.65 to 1.91)	2.91 (2.63 to 3.22)	single mother: 2.35 (1.43 to 3.86), model with poverty controls
Missed 11+ school days	1.52 (1.45 to 1.59)	2.73 (2.55 to 2.93)	single mother: 1.54 (1.02 to 2.32)

Outcome	Children of single mothers vs. married parents (U.S.)	Children with 4+ adversities vs. none (U.S.)	Texas
Behavior problems	1.90 (1.81 to 2.00)		single mother: 1.79 (1.22 to 2.63)

These are adjusted odds ratios, cross-sectional and correlational. A log-linear test shows the family-structure association is not explained by poverty (Texas behavior problems $G^2 = 9.0$, $p = .03$). DOCUMENTED analysis; causal share applied in the model

What adversity does to children: odds of harm, adjusted for poverty



Source: TCMF analysis of the National Survey of Children's Health, 2023-2025 (151,676 children). Correlational.

Figure. A child carrying four or more adversities is about seven times as likely to need mental health treatment and nearly three times as likely to repeat a grade, even after poverty is accounted for. The line at 1 marks no difference.

5. The reforms and what they prevent

Due-process removal. Texas removed 9,972 children in FY2025 (provisional), down from about 19,000 in 2016; children average 22.9 months in care. Each avoided removal saves about \$104,000 in foster care, administration, and legal costs: 22.9 months at IV-E administration (\$2,576 a month, FY2023) plus placement (central \$1,708 a month, from Texas's own IV-E foster family home claim of \$1,573 a month, FY2023, raised to 2026), plus county appointed counsel. The model assumes 5% to 30% of removals are marginal cases a due-process hearing would keep home. INFERENCE

RESEARCH In 1990s Illinois, children at the margin of removal did better at home; in Michigan, 2008 to 2016, placement helped some. The authors reconcile the two: Illinois removed far more children (about 16% of investigations) into longer, less stable care; Michigan removed about 3.3%, mostly to relatives, so the child at the margin of removal was different in each State. Texas now removes few children, so the model claims **no crime savings** from avoided removals, only foster care and legal costs. DOCUMENTED

Source: Doyle (2007, 2008); Gross & Baron (2022); Bald, Doyle, Gross & Jacob (2022), J. Econ. Perspectives

Texas school costs (TEA, 2024-25 actual, all funds). Operating expenditures were \$12,951 per student across 5,528,915 students; spending on students with disabilities was \$10.06 billion, about \$12,600 for each of the roughly 800,000 students in special education. The model uses these figures for grade repetition and special education. DOCUMENTED

Equal parenting time as the default for fit parents. The evidence and the model statute are in the [TCMF research report](#). About 103,000 Texas children a year enter divorce or parent-child suits (OCA FY2024: 47,944 divorces with children, 15,090 parent-child suits). DOCUMENTED counts; children per case INFERENCE

RESEARCH In 11,027 Swedish custody disputes randomly assigned to 191 judges, joint custody raised children's test scores 0.47 SD, raised fathers' chance of earning above the bottom quarter by 17 to 25 points, cut fathers' antidepressant use by roughly half, kept parents closer, and showed no significant increase in partner-violence suspicions (estimate imprecise). Mothers' earnings dipped in years 1 and 2, then showed no difference. Causal (random judge). DOCUMENTED

Source: Canessa, Dahl, Hasselqvist, Meghir & Niknami (2026), working paper, IFS WP 26/43, NBER w35482

RESEARCH Divorce at ages 0 to 5 lowers earnings at 27 by about 9 to 13%, raises incarceration 0.2 points (43%), teen births 0.9 points (73%), and death by 25 by 0.39 points. Distance between parents explains 15 to 22% of some effects. DOCUMENTED

Source: Johnston, Jones & Pope (2025), working paper, NBER w33776, sibling design, over 5 million children

What the model counts. It assumes equal parenting prevents 15% to 40% of the measured divorce penalty and counts only 25% to 60% of correlational links as causal. Together the two reforms reach about 27,500 children a year at full protection (21,000 to 35,400). INFERENCE

6. Public assistance

When both parents stay in a child's life, fewer families need public help. Texas children of single mothers were 7.1 times as likely to receive SNAP (5.2 to 9.8) and 3.9 times as likely to be covered by a government assistance plan such as Medicaid or CHIP (2.9 to 5.3); neither figure is adjusted for income, and they are not causal. Eligibility is set by household income, so the programs do not disappear, and two low-income households can each qualify. The causal channel is earnings: joint custody lifted more fathers above the bottom quarter of earners. Texas pays 40.2% of Medicaid (federal share 59.83%, FY2026), most of basic TANF (about \$59 million a year), and none of SNAP benefits (LBB, Safety Net Programs, 2022). Because these programs follow income, the model does not count SNAP or Medicaid savings directly; the gain reaches them through earnings, counted once in section 7. DOCUMENTED ratios; INFERENCE savings

7. The totals

Texas budget, long run (steady state). Declining IV-D and IV-E must beat about \$1.15 billion a year. All rows are drawn together in one model (TCMF_MODEL_LEDGER_V10), so the total's range is the true joint range.

Table: The Texas budget ledger. Each row is money Texas would stop spending or start receiving each year once the reforms have matured. The first row is documented today; the rest are projections built from the studies above, shown as low-to-high ranges. The bottom line is compared with the \$1.15 billion in federal money Texas would forgo by declining IV-D and IV-E.

Source	Per year	Basis
Costs Texas stops paying on refusal: State share of IV-D administration (\$156M), county appointed counsel in CPS cases (\$66.2M), M.D. v. Abbott litigation (about \$55M)	\$277M	<u>DOCUMENTED</u>
Childhood public systems, Texas share: grade repetition, special education, mental health care, juvenile justice	\$44M to \$97M	<u>INFERENCE</u>
Adult health, addiction, crime, and jail (public share only; taxes counted below)	\$41M to \$101M	<u>INFERENCE</u>
State and local taxes on children's higher adult earnings (8.6% to 10.9% of income; ITEP)	\$282M to \$602M	<u>INFERENCE</u>
Parents' net earnings, Texas tax share (Canessa)	\$1M to \$4M	<u>INFERENCE</u>
Foster care avoided: about 1,000 to 2,400 marginal removals a year at about \$104,000 each (section 5), Texas share while IV-E continues	\$51M to \$125M (full cost \$102M to \$248M if Texas declines IV-E)	<u>INFERENCE</u>
Fewer courts: about 23 to 44 family, child protection, and child support court seats no	\$29M to \$57M	<u>INFERENCE</u> ; inputs PENDING

Source	Per year	Basis
longer needed, each with judge, judicial retirement contribution, reporter, staff, courtroom, and appointed counsel, plus the lifetime pension each seat would add		
Total if Texas declines IV-D and IV-E (joint 10th to 90th percentile; foster care at full cost)	\$869M to \$1.28B (central \$1.05B)	Chance above \$1.15B: about 1 in 4
Gain if the reforms are made within federal law (total less the \$277M; foster care at Texas share)	\$517M to \$905M (central \$686M)	<u>INFERENCE</u>

What is already inside these rows, and what is not. The salaries, benefits, and retirement contributions of the teachers, counselors, juvenile officers, and prison staff who serve these children and adults are already inside the per-unit costs above: the LBB's uniform cost figures incorporate ERS and TRS benefit spending. Counting the positions again would double count. What the earlier ledger missed, and this one adds, is the cost of the removals themselves and of the courts that process them. Adult Protective Services serves adults and is not affected. A smaller prison population means fewer state and county positions and, decades on, fewer pensions; the savings from that are in the adult row.

LAW A district judge draws at least \$175,000 a year from the State. A retired judge's pension is 50% of the current salary of the bench, 60% if he retires within a year of leaving it. A retired judge sitting by assignment is paid the court's salary from State general revenue.

DOCUMENTED

Source: Tex. Gov't Code §§ 659.012(a)(1), 839.102, 74.061(c)

RECORD The State pays 19.25% of judicial payroll into JRS II. Texas filed 222,111 new family cases in FY2024. Digital recording costs about \$72,733 a courtroom a year, against \$118,463 to \$167,941 for a stenographic reporter. DOCUMENTED

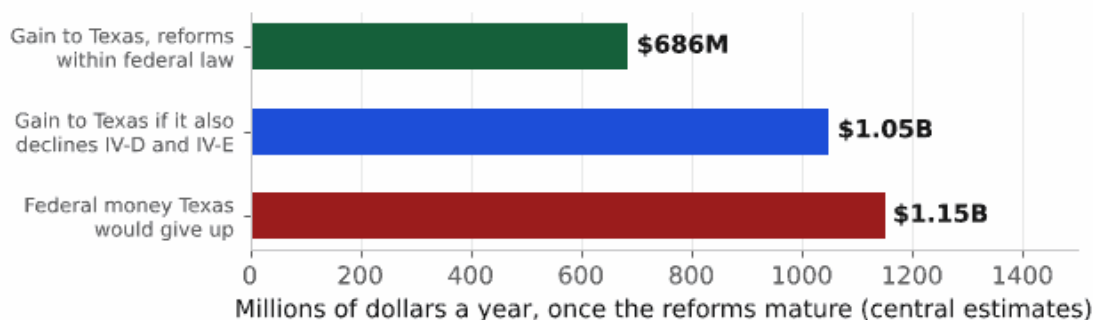
Source: Pension Review Board, JRS Plan Two; OCA FY2024 Annual Report; OCA Digital Court Recording Study (Oct. 1, 2026); LBB Uniform Cost Report (Feb. 2023)

The courts, and the pensions behind them. Because the pension follows the *current* salary of the bench, every judicial raise raises every retired judge's check, and a retired judge who returns to sit by assignment draws the court's salary on top of that pension. Every family court seat that is never created avoids, over its life, roughly \$1.8 million to \$2.6 million in pension payments alone. New family filings in FY2024 were the fewest since 1996. A system that

removes fewer children and litigates fewer custody fights needs fewer courts, fewer reporters and staff, and fewer pensions. DOCUMENTED law; INFERENCE savings

A companion reform, not counted. The Office of Court Administration’s October 2026 study puts the savings from digital recording at \$45,700 to \$95,200 per courtroom a year. Applied across Texas trial courtrooms not already recording, that is roughly \$40 million to \$60 million a year. The study recommends a trained recorder in every courtroom and treats recording as a complement to stenographic reporters, not a replacement. This saving does not depend on the two reforms and is not in the total. DOCUMENTED costs; INFERENCE statewide figure

The reforms pay; declining the federal money comes close



Source: TCMF_MODEL_LEDGER_V10 (joint Monte Carlo, 20,000 draws); federal amounts: OCSS, ACF, CRS.

Figure. Made within federal law, the reforms return about \$686 million a year to Texas at maturity. If Texas also declined the federal money, its total gain of about \$1.05 billion would come within about \$100 million of the \$1.15 billion given up.

Society: lifetime value of the children reached over 20 years, at 3%. One joint model (TCMF_MODEL_SOCIETY_V9) now draws the earnings and the health channels together for the same children, so they add without double counting: crime is counted once, and the health value counts only medical care and healthy years of life, not earnings.

Table: The gain to Texas society. The first two rows add to the third. The last row is a separate, narrower measure kept as a cross-check and not added.

Measure	Low	Central	High
Children’s higher adult earnings, incarceration, teen births (causal designs)	\$13B	\$19B	\$27B
Health and healthy years of life (Peterson et al. 2023 per-person adversity burden, health and	\$56B	\$91B	\$140B

Measure	Low	Central	High
life only, 25% to 60% causal; each child reached counted as one case avoided)			
Total (joint 10th to 90th percentile)	\$72B	\$110B	\$163B
Cross-check: abuse and neglect prevented only (about 1,240 children a year, upper bound)	\$14B	\$21B	\$32B

About 83% of the total is the value of health and quality of life, priced the way federal agencies price it; about 17% is cash earnings. At a 7% discount the total is \$26 billion to \$63 billion.

Timing. Foster care and litigation savings arrive in year one. Childhood public-system savings arrive over the school years. Adult and tax returns build from about year 17 and reach full size only decades out. Within 20 years the Texas budget falls short of the federal money; at steady state the total reaches about \$1.05 billion against \$1.15 billion. **INFERENCE**

Already scored. The Legislative Budget Board found “no significant fiscal implication to the State” for H.B. 803 (87R, 2021), an equal-parenting bill, and no significant state cost for H.B. 567 (87R, 2021), the removal-grounds bill. **DOCUMENTED**

8. The five liberty principles

Table: The five liberty principles. Each row takes one of the principles Texas Policy Research uses to grade legislation and shows how the reforms satisfy it.

Principle	How the reforms apply it
Individual liberty	A fit parent’s right to the care of the child is honored before the State acts (due process before removal).
Personal responsibility	Both parents keep the duty and the time to raise the child; support orders follow ability to pay.
Free enterprise	Fathers’ earnings rise under joint custody (Canessa 2026); fewer orders above ability to pay that cut earnings (Cancian, Heinrich & Chung 2013).
Private property rights	Support collected for a child reaches the child, not State cost recovery.

Principle	How the reforms apply it
Limited government	Fewer removals, fewer contempt jailings, smaller federal conditions on Texas law; the LBB scored the lead bills at no significant State cost.

Consistent with TPPF's own work. TPPF's *The Texas Two-Step* (Brown & Huntzinger, July 2020) put Title IV-E at more than \$354 million, about 16% of DFPS child welfare spending, and urged independent efficiency audits and caution with federal conditions. TPPF's September 2026 paper, *Toward an Office of Parental Rights in Texas*, finds Texas parental-rights protections under-enforced. The reforms here are the enforcement: due process before removal and equal time for fit parents are the parental rights that paper describes, priced.

9. The federal choice

Table: The federal choice. Three paths, from least to most change, with the price and the return of each.

Option	What it costs	What it buys
A. Reform within federal law (equal parenting, removal standard, recording, findings, genetic testing, self-support reserve)	No significant State cost (LBB; local hearing costs unquantified)	About \$686M a year at maturity (section 7)
B. Keep the money; seek waivers under 42 U.S.C. § 1315 for child support positions that conflict with § 666	Negotiation	Federal flexibility; earlier IV-E waivers cut maintenance costs
C. Decline IV-D and IV-E	About \$1.15B a year, including TANF	Texas law freed from federal conditions; total gain about \$1.05B a year at maturity, about \$100M short of the money given up, about a 1 in 4 chance of breaking even

No state has declined both. It is a constitutional choice open to Texas (*South Dakota v. Dole*; *Printz v. United States*), and this report prices it rather than urging it.

10. What the other side will say, answered first

Table: Objections answered. The strongest arguments against the reforms, each with the evidence that answers it.

Objection	Answer
"Removal protects children; fewer removals mean more abuse."	Gross & Baron (2022) found placement helped some Michigan children. The model therefore claims no crime savings from avoided removals and counts only the marginal cases a due-process hearing would keep home. Due process is not no removal.
"Equal parenting harms infants and exposes children to violent parents."	Tornello & Emery (2013) and McIntosh et al. (2013) concern infants' overnights and are correlational; the fit-parent and graduated-schedule language of the TCMF research report answers them. Canessa (2026, random judges) found no significant increase in partner-violence suspicions (estimate imprecise); Spain's reforms cut non-extreme partner violence about 40% (Fernández-Kranz, Nollenberger & Roff 2025).
"Divorce restrictions trap women; no-fault cut female suicide."	Stevenson & Wolfers (2006) is printed beside Gruber (2004); Brown, Flinn & Mullins (2025) is a structural model, not a measured effect. The equal-parenting savings do not depend on any change in divorce rates.
"These are correlations."	The earnings and parent channels rest on causal designs measuring divorce and custody effects (random judges, sibling comparisons); the share equal parenting prevents (15% to 40%) is our assumption. The abuse, adversity, and public-system channels are correlational and enter at only 25% to 60%.
"Two households will draw more welfare, not less."	Granted in section 6; the savings counted come from earnings and reduced need, not from closing programs.
"Separation does not hurt grades" (Grätz & Härkönen 2024).	Printed as counterevidence; the model's education value runs through Canessa's random-judge result and is counted once.
"The numbers double count."	The budget ledger books taxes once (tax row only), leaves SNAP and Medicaid to the earnings channel, and draws all rows jointly; the society model draws earnings and health jointly with crime counted once; earnings value from test scores is not added to the

Objection	Answer
	earnings channel.

11. Method and limits

Replication. Every number in this report can be reproduced from public data and the code listed here.

- **Software:** Python 3.13 with numpy, pandas, statsmodels, scipy, and matplotlib.
- **Monte Carlo models (20,000 draws each, triangular inputs printed in the code, fixed seeds, 10th/50th/90th percentiles):** TCMF_MODEL_COSTBENEFIT_V3_20261016.py (children's earnings, seed 13; 3% and 7% present values over 5, 10, and 20 entering cohorts, each cohort's lifetime benefits counted at entry and discounted from birth, which understates value); TCMF_MODEL_SOCIETY_V9_20261016.py (society: earnings and health together, seed 9; same discounting; replaces the separate v4 adversity lens, which double counted crime and used a 2019-to-2026 inflation factor of 1.10 instead of 1.318); TCMF_MODEL_MALTX_V7_20261016.py (abuse and neglect, seed 41; per cohort, times the 3% 20-cohort annuity factor 15.32 for the society table); TCMF_MODEL_V6_PARENTS_TAX_20261016.py (parents, seed 31); TCMF_MODEL_LEDGER_V10_20261016.py (the Texas budget ledger, seed 10, replacing v8; adds avoided removals, courts, and judicial retirement; all rows drawn jointly at steady state, undiscounted, odds ratios converted to probabilities, taxes counted once). Earlier versions (v2, v5, v5B) are kept as the development record.
- **Survey analysis:** National Survey of Children's Health, 2023, 2024, and 2025 topical files (U.S. Census Bureau for HRSA MCHB), pooled, 151,676 children; Texas subsample about 2,250. Survey weight FWC divided by 3. Weighted logistic regression (statsmodels GLM, binomial, frequency weights normalized to mean 1), with robust (HC1) or household-clustered standard errors. Exposures: family structure (FAMILY_R: married biological, step, single mother, single father) and adversity count (ACE3 to ACE10: 0, 1, 2 to 3, 4 or more). Controls: child age, sex, household poverty (FPL_I1 in four groups); the first models also parent education (HIGRADE) and survey year. Survey variables were checked against the NSCH codebook (for example, K12Q12 is a government assistance plan such as Medicaid or CHIP; K12Q03 is employer or union coverage). Strata and primary sampling units were not modeled, so intervals are approximate and somewhat narrow. The share of single-parent children living with their mother (77% U.S., 83% Texas) is the weighted share from the same files. Log-linear tests hold family-by-poverty and poverty-by-outcome margins fixed.
- **Causal share:** correlational links are counted at 25% to 60%; causal designs at full strength; the Swedish parent effects carry a 0.65 transfer factor to Texas.
- **Inflation:** BLS CPI-U all items: 2010 = 218.056, 2015 = 237.017, September 2026 = 336.940.
- **No double counting:** in the budget ledger each cost is booked once and taxes appear only in the tax row; in the society model earnings and health are drawn jointly for the

same children, crime is counted once, and the health value excludes earnings. The abuse-and-neglect measure overlaps both and is shown only as a cross-check.

The data Texas does not keep. This draft leans on national and foreign studies because Texas does not publish the outcomes that matter. No public record shows, by court and by parent, who receives custody and on what schedule; how children fare after a removal, a custody order, or a child support order; or whether any program meant to protect children improves their lives over time. The Commission is positioned to fix that. We recommend:

1. **Court outcome reporting.** Each court reports, by case type, the custody and possession schedule ordered, the sex of each parent awarded conservatorship, findings of family violence, and whether orders were agreed or decided after an evidentiary hearing.
1. **Removal outcomes.** DFPS reports, for every child removed, the grounds, the hearing timeline, placement moves, reentry, maltreatment in care, and outcomes at 18, 21, and 25, linked to education, health, and justice records.
2. **Child support outcomes.** OAG reports orders against verified income, arrears, enforcement actions taken, and whether children's contact with each parent rose or fell.
3. **A Texas longitudinal cohort.** A study following children of separated parents and children reached by CPS into adulthood, with a comparison group, so effects can be measured in Texas rather than borrowed from Sweden or Illinois.
4. **Program accountability.** Every program spending public money on children reports measured outcomes against its stated purpose, on a common standard, so the Legislature can fund what works and stop funding what does not.

These metrics would turn every **PENDING** and **INFERENCE** tag in this report into a Texas fact, for or against these reforms. A system confident in its results should welcome them.

Companion documents. The [TCMF research report](#) holds the full evidence review, the legal analysis, and the model statutes these costs refer to.

Open inputs **PENDING:** Texas figures from records requests sent Oct. 2 and Oct. 15, 2026 (DFPS, TJJD, TEA, HHSC, DSHS, OAG, TDCJ, TIDC, and others).

What would disprove these findings: sibling or twin studies showing maltreatment and adversity effects vanish within families; Texas records showing due process would not change removals or that equal-parenting orders would not change who lives with whom; evidence that federal funding rules do not shape Texas removal and enforcement decisions.

12. Statement of interest and about the author

Statement of interest. The author provides Adult Attachment Interview coding, Attachment Q-Sort administration, and Trust-Based Relational Intervention training commercially. The recommendations here are vendor-neutral: none requires any product or provider. The author is a party to his own family-law proceeding in Texas, which is not discussed here. His civic record includes support for S.B. 293 and S.J.R. 27 (89th Legislature) on judicial accountability

and service in party office. These interests are disclosed in full so that the evidence can be judged on its own.

About the author. L. Brooks McKenzie, PhD, holds a Ph.D. in Experimental Psychology, with an emphasis in Developmental Psychology, from Texas Christian University, where his dissertation developed an adult attachment scale, and an M.A. in Clinical Psychology from Cardinal Stritch University. He served as Research Scientist and then Assistant Director of Research at the TCU Institute of Child Development, which developed Trust-Based Relational Intervention (TBRI), and has chaired doctoral dissertations and taught psychology at the college level. His peer-reviewed work on attachment, adoption, and child welfare appears in the *Journal of Child Custody*, *Children and Youth Services Review*, *Child: Care, Health and Development*, and the *Journal of Aggression, Maltreatment & Trauma*. He has presented to Texas judges at the Texas Judicial Summit and to the Tarrant County Family Law Bar Association, and has been qualified and has testified as an expert witness in courts across Texas and in other states. He is certified reliable in coding the Adult Attachment Interview by Mary Main and Erik Hesse of the University of California, Berkeley. He is not a licensed psychologist and offers no diagnosis, treatment, or opinion on any person he has not assessed.

Sources (principal)

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<https://drive.google.com/file/d/1paUWinAWWhNIbYWOjcCNCITJX5b9emBVR/view>.