

What Texas Pays When Children Are Removed, and What It Gains by Keeping Families Whole

For the Supreme Court of Texas Children's Commission, Data Committee · L. Brooks McKenzie, PhD · Nov. 6, 2026 · Prices the findings of the Best Interest of the Child report. Working estimates; Texas records requests pending.

The finding. Federal foster care money runs about 45 to 1 toward placement over prevention, and Texas children carry the cost.

- **Federal funding.** Title IV-E claims, FY2023: \$5.05 billion for foster care against \$112.7 million for prevention (ASPE, Feb. 2026). DOCUMENTED.
- **Money tied to the structure.** About \$1.15 billion a year in federal IV-D, IV-E, and the TANF grant tied to IV-D (OCSS FY2024; Children's Bureau FY2023; Comptroller FY2024). DOCUMENTED.
- **Children in State care.** A federal court found Texas foster care a system where "rape, abuse, psychotropic medication, and instability are the norm" (M.D. v. Abbott, S.D. Tex. 2015). DOCUMENTED.
- **Return is not repair.** Of children who left DFPS custody five years earlier, 47.9 percent were later alleged victims in a new investigation (DFPS open data, CPS 2.10). DOCUMENTED.
- **The Texas bill.** DFPS confirmed 51,985 victims in FY2025. Their lifetime costs: about \$16.9 billion, \$3.1 billion of it on taxpayers (Fang et al. 2012, in 2026 dollars). INFERENCE (model).

What two reforms return (model results, 10th to 90th percentile of 20,000 draws): due process before removal, and both fit parents engaged.

Measure	Result
Children spared abuse or neglect	about 1,240 a year (830 to 1,830; upper bound)
Avoided marginal removals	about 1,000 to 2,400 a year, about \$104,000 each in foster care, administration, and legal cost
Lifetime value, children reached over 20 years (3%)	about \$110 billion (\$72 billion to \$163 billion)
Texas budget gain at maturity, within federal law	about \$686 million a year (\$517 million to \$905 million)

The Legislative Budget Board found no significant State cost for the lead bills (H.B. 803 and H.B. 567, 87R).

The honest limit. The family-structure and adversity links are correlational and enter the model at 25 to 60 percent; removal effects differ by state (Bald, Doyle, Gross & Jacob 2022), so the model claims no crime savings from avoided removals. Every input and line of code is open for the Data Committee's review; the full cost and outcome report is available on request.

For the Data Committee

- Review the open model.
- Report, for every child removed: grounds, hearing timeline, placement moves, reentry, maltreatment in care, and outcomes at 18, 21, and 25.
- Report child welfare court outcomes by parent: who is engaged, who the child is placed with, and time to placement with a parent or relative.
- Fund a Texas longitudinal cohort of children reached by CPS, with a comparison group.

What would change this. Texas records showing due process would not change removals, or sibling studies showing adversity effects vanish within families.

Statement of interest: the author provides Adult Attachment Interview coding, Attachment Q-Sort administration, and TBRI training commercially; recommendations are vendor-neutral.