



**Combined Children's
Advocacy Programs and
Contingency for Children's
Advocacy Center and Court
Appointed Special Advocate
Grants Report for Fiscal Year
2022**

**As Required by
Senate Bill 1, 87th Legislature, Regular
Session, 2021 (Article II, Health and Human
Services Commission, Rider 80(d)) and
Texas Family Code, Section 264.608**

**Texas Health and Human Services
December 2022**



TEXAS
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Table of Contents

Executive Summary	3
Introduction.....	4
1. Background	5
Texas CASA	5
CACTX	6
2. Continued COVID-19 Impact on Texas CASA and CACTX	7
Texas CASA	7
CACTX	8
3. Funding and Expenditures	9
Grants	9
Expenditures.....	10
Administrative Expenditures	10
Required Data	11
4. Oversight.....	14
5. Contract Effectiveness.....	15
Texas CASA	15
CACTX	16
Conclusion	17
List of Acronyms	18

Executive Summary

The *Combined Children's Advocacy Programs and Contingency for Children's Advocacy Center and Court Appointed Special Advocate Grants Report for Fiscal Year 2022* is submitted in compliance with the 2022-23 General Appropriations Act, Senate Bill 1, 87th Legislature, Regular Session, 2021 (Article II, Health and Human Services Commission [HHSC], Rider 80(d)) and Texas Family Code Section 264.608.

Rider 80(d) requires HHSC to submit a report detailing the expenditures of funds appropriated for children's advocacy programs. Section 264.608 requires HHSC to submit a detailed report of the data on contracts and client services.

Beginning in fiscal year 2016, HHSC established contracts to administer the Court Appointed Special Advocates (CASA) program and Children's Advocacy Centers (CAC) program pursuant to Senate Bill 354, 84th Legislature, Regular Session, 2015.

The CASA program provides training, technical assistance, evaluation, and funding administration to local programs who provide recruitment, training, and supervision of volunteer advocates. The program represents children under the age of 18 who are in the protective custody of the Texas Department of Family and Protective Services (DFPS). In fiscal year 2022, HHSC contracted with Texas CASA to provide administration of this program and to contract with local programs for direct services.

The CAC program provides training, technical assistance, evaluation services, and funds administration to local programs that facilitate the investigation and prosecution of child sexual and physical abuse cases and provide critical support and aftercare services to children and their families. In fiscal year 2022, HHSC contracted with the Children's Advocacy Centers of Texas (CACTX) to provide administration of this program and to contract with local programs for direct services.

Introduction

Rider 80(d) requires HHSC to submit a report by December 1 of each fiscal year detailing the expenditures of funds appropriated for children's advocacy programs to the Governor, Senate Finance Committee, House Appropriations Committee, and the Legislative Budget Board.

The report must include:

- Information demonstrating continuity of service from the previous fiscal year;
- Services provided and the number of children for whom the services were provided;
- The amount of grants awarded in each of the categories;
- The amount of expenditures for administration;
- The amount of expenditures from General Revenue - Dedicated Compensation to Victims of Crime Fund Account No. 0469;
- The amount of expenditures from General Revenue - Dedicated Sexual Assault Program Account No. 5010; and
- Oversight activities conducted an analysis of the effectiveness of the contracts relating to the children's advocacy programs.

Additionally, Section 264.608 of the Texas Family Code requires HHSC to submit an annual report by December 1 of each fiscal year to the Governor, Lieutenant Governor, Speaker of the House of Representatives, members of the Legislature, and the Legislative Budget Board. This report must:

- Summarize reports from volunteer advocate programs under contract with HHSC;
- Analyze the effectiveness of the contracts made by HHSC under Chapter 264; and
- Provide information on:
 - ▶ The expenditure of funds under Chapter 264;
 - ▶ Services provided and the number of children for whom the services were provided; and
 - ▶ Any other information relating to the services provided by the volunteer advocate programs under Chapter 264.

1. Background

HHSC Children's Advocacy Program provides critical advocacy services for children who have experienced abuse, witnessed violence, or are in the custody of DFPS. HHSC contracts with one statewide organization to administer services for children's advocacy services and one statewide organization for children's court appointed advocacy services. These statewide organizations must meet all applicable requirements outlined in Chapter 264 of Texas Family Code.

The HHSC Children's Advocacy Program's responsibilities include oversight of funds management, contract administration, contract monitoring, oversight of program operations, and provision of technical assistance to contracted entities.

In addition to statutory requirements in the Texas Family Code, HHSC maintains administrative rules to provide the operating standards for each of the statewide children's advocacy programs. CASA standards of operation are found in the Texas Administrative Code [Title 1, Part 15, Chapter 377, Subchapter B](#), and CAC standards of operation are found in [Title 1, Part 15, Chapter 377, Subchapter C](#).

Texas CASA

Texas CASA is the statewide association for 72 local CASA programs that provide advocacy for children in DFPS custody in 219 counties. Texas CASA supports the CASA network by administering HHSC funding to local programs and providing training and technical assistance. At the local level, the programs recruit, train, and supervise CASA volunteers to advocate for the best interests of children involved in foster care and to improve their well-being. CASA volunteers typically remain with their assigned child/children until the case closes due to the child achieving permanency or aging out of care.

At the state level, Texas CASA provides a variety of services including financial support, training, technical assistance, and monitoring for standards compliance to ensure the local programs operate effectively. Texas CASA develops training curricula concerning CASA standards for volunteers and local staff to advocate for abused and neglected children in Texas. Additionally, Texas CASA provides evaluation services and funds administration for local volunteer advocate programs in accordance with Texas Family Code Chapter 264, Subchapter G, Court-Appointed Volunteer Advocate Programs.

CACTX

CACTX is the membership organization for all 70 CAC programs in Texas, ensuring access to safety, justice, and healing for Texas children impacted by sexual and physical abuse through the CAC multidisciplinary team approach. This team is comprised of law enforcement, DFPS, the local prosecuting authority, and medical and mental health professionals who collaboratively develop effective, coordinated case strategies, and provide specialized direct services sensitive to the needs of each case and child. CACTX assists in the operation of local CAC programs by developing and adopting standards and providing specialized training, technical assistance, evaluation services, and funds administration to support CAC programs under Texas Family Code Section 264.409.

2. Continued COVID-19 Impact on Texas CASA and CACTX

Texas CASA

Texas CASA continues to adjust to the impact of COVID-19 as it relates to workforce issues and employee retention. Texas CASA and local programs experienced the turnover of staff due to retirements, other family member considerations (e.g., daycare), or employees who moved to be closer to family. Due to the number of position vacancies resulting across the state in many fields, many employees were able to leave for higher paying jobs and career advancement. Local programs in many parts of the state, along with Texas CASA, struggled to remain competitive in the job market. Loss of staff at Texas CASA meant some functions were under-addressed as it took longer to fill positions than expected. Moreover, at the local level, with much of the turnover being at the executive director or volunteer supervisor level, volunteer retention suffered significantly. A total of 35 executive directors left their positions between fiscal years 2020 and 2022.

Additionally, Texas CASA, like many local CASA programs and other organizations, has the challenge of determining the best ways to grow and innovate in the “new normal” of the post-pandemic environment. The past two-and-a-half years have been a series of adjustments to events, recruitment and training techniques, technology needed for child visitations, and other unexpected obstacles. This has yielded several innovative solutions, but Texas CASA sees the impact of the uncertainty on the statewide network and Texas CASA staff. This uncertainty also leads to another substantial impact – reduced volunteer recruitment and retention.

The number of volunteers decreased in this last year, primarily due to COVID-19 illness, COVID-19 fatigue and burnout in the population at large, relocation, and the changes in the economy, including rising costs. These changes have impacted individuals’ time and ability to volunteer. Texas CASA has been working with local programs to address volunteer recruitment and retention in this new environment.

To ensure ongoing support and fluid communication, Texas CASA, local programs, and courts are leaning toward leveraging technology in new ways. They are seeing an increased number of local program board members and staff attending trainings as virtual trainings and meetings, which have reduced the need to travel. The

pandemic and other changes challenged Texas CASA to look at where and how they can do things differently to support the workforce and their members.

CACTX

COVID-19 significantly impacted CACTX and local CACs in a variety of ways. Illness absences continue to impact attendance at collaborative, multidisciplinary meetings and trainings, requiring frequent pivots to host some meetings and trainings virtually. However, with the evolving COVID-19 climate, CACTX was able to offer more in-person training opportunities for participants and CAC staff. CACTX continues to focus on maximizing the safety of training participants and ensuring CAC staff are equipped to serve children and families.

School openings and closures inevitably impact reports of child abuse to the Texas DFPS statewide abuse hotline, as teachers and school personnel are the largest group of reporters of child abuse. Due to the added complexity of these cases during the pandemic, CACs continue to see a greater need for a longer duration of mental health services to thoroughly address victims' needs, which has led to children and families staying on waitlists before receiving services. This increased duration and intensity of cases has also led to turnover, hiring challenges, and burnout in the field of mental health, as well as at DFPS, and in CACs.

The economic impacts of the pandemic have increased family needs for additional support and requires additional CAC family advocacy services and resources. The ongoing workforce shortages and turnover, current inflation, and economic issues continue to impact this growing need. Together, all these influences continue to impact CAC fundraising efforts and revenue security.

3. Funding and Expenditures

Grants

HHSC was appropriated funding for the Children’s Advocacy Programs as shown on Table 1, which delineates grant funding by program. Table 2 details the method of financing for the grant awards.

For fiscal year 2022, this includes an additional \$999,999.00 the Legislature appropriated HHSC for CASA services, and an additional \$10,948,063.00 in funding for CAC services, per year. This included \$6,948,063 per year in federal funds.

This additional funding was purposed to expand the service capacity, increase the number of children served, and increase access to mental health services in both CASA and CAC programs in fiscal years 2022 and 2023.

Table 1. Fiscal Year 2022 Grant Award by Program

Program	Grant Amount
CASA	\$15,964,000.00
CAC	\$34,547,067.00
Total	\$50,511,067.00

Table 2. Fiscal Year 2022 Grant Award by Financing Method

Financing Method	Grant Amount
General Revenue	\$28,319,660.00
License Plate Trust Fund Account No. 0802	\$13,500.00
General Revenue – Dedicated Compensation to Victims of Crime Fund Account No. 0469	\$10,229,844.00
General Revenue – Dedicated Sexual Assault Program Account No. 5010	\$5,000,000.00
Social Services Block Grant Title XX funds transferred from Temporary Assistance for Needy Families	\$6,948,063.00
Total	\$50,511,067.00

Expenditures

Table 3 details funds expended by Texas CASA for fiscal year 2022.

Table 3. Texas CASA Expenditures

Texas CASA	Expended	Unexpended Balance	Total
General Revenue	\$10,335,316.41	\$500,261.59	\$10,835,578.00
General Revenue - Dedicated Compensation to Victims of Crime Fund No. 0469	\$5,114,922.00	\$0.00	\$5,114,922.00
License Plate Trust Fund Account No. 0802	\$5,825.44	\$7,674.56	\$13,500.00
Total	\$15,456,063.85	\$507,936.15	\$15,964,000.00

Table 4 details the funds expended by CACTX for fiscal year 2022.

Table 4. CACTX Expenditures

CACTX	Expended	Unexpended Balance	Total
General Revenue	\$14,040,864.47	\$3,443,217.53	\$17,484,082.00
General Revenue - Dedicated Compensation to Victims of Crime Fund No. 0469	\$5,114,922.00	\$0.00	\$5,114,922.00
General Revenue – Dedicated Sexual Assault Program Fund No. 5010	\$5,000,000.00	\$0.00	\$5,000,000.00
Social Services Block Grant Title XX funds transferred from Temporary Assistance to Needy Families	\$6,948,063.00	\$0.00	\$6,948,063.00
Total	\$31,103,849.47	\$3,443,217.53	\$34,547,067.00

Administrative Expenditures

Texas Family Code, Chapter 264, Subchapters E and G, cap administrative expenses for the Children’s Advocacy Programs contractors. Administrative

expenses cannot exceed 12 percent of the annual legislative appropriation. Table 5 shows the total amount of administrative expenditures for each contractor and the percentage of the annual legislative appropriation.

Table 5. Administrative Expenses by Total and Percent of Legislative Appropriation

Contractor	Administrative Expenses	Percent of Legislative Appropriation
Texas CASA	\$1,382,757.21	8.95%
CACTX	\$3,114,002.93	10.01%

Required Data

Table 6 provides information regarding contracts for both Texas CASA and CACTX.

Table 6. Fiscal Year 2022 Contracts Summary

FY22 Expenditure	Texas CASA	CACTX
Contract Term	2 years	2 years
FY 2022 Total Awarded Amount	\$15,964,000.00	\$34,547,067.00
Administrative Cap	\$1,915,680.00	\$4,145,648.04
Actual Administrative Expense	\$1,382,757.21	\$3,114,002.93
Actual Service Expense	\$14,073,634.39	\$27,989,846.54
Total Expenditures	\$15,456,391.60	\$31,103,849.47

The fiscal year 2022 total awarded amount for Texas CASA includes the License Plate Trust Fund Account No. 0802. Administrative expenses capture all program expenditures related to carrying out the requirements of Texas Family Code Section 264.608 including specialized training, technical assistance, evaluation services, and funds administration to support local CASA and CAC programs.

HHSC receives quarterly statistical reports from Texas CASA and CACTX detailing client and service data and information from each local program. The following data is based on those reports.

Table 7 details Texas CASA’s fiscal year 2022 performance data. The data for new children served includes the count of unduplicated children served in fiscal year 2022. The data for total children served includes all children served in fiscal year 2022.

Table 7. Fiscal Year 2022 Texas CASA Data

Data	Total Number
Total Children Served	23,943
New Children Served	6,914
Total Court-Appointed Volunteers	9,590
New Volunteers	2,566
Local Programs	72
Counties Served	219

Table 8 shows CACTX’s fiscal year 2022 performance data. The data for new children served includes the count of unduplicated children served in fiscal year 2022. The data for total children served includes all children served in fiscal year 2022.

Table 8. Fiscal Year 2022 CACTX Data

Data	Total Number
Total Children Served	67,558
New Children Served	54,217
Children Receiving Mental Health Services	24,355
Forensics Interviews Conducted On-site	44,969
Child Abuse Cases Reviewed by Multidisciplinary Team	40,428
Training Sessions Provided to Local Advocacy Centers	323
Local Programs	70
Counties Receiving Full Services	211

4. Oversight

HHSC provided oversight of Children’s Advocacy Programs contracts by evaluating contractual compliance, reviewing operational policies and procedures, examining local program monitoring files, and ensuring fiscal controls. HHSC completed contract monitoring activities during fiscal year 2022 for both Texas CASA and CACTX.

Contract oversight activities indicated that services are being provided in accordance with program and contractual requirements. Oversight activities remain ongoing to ensure that contracted providers continue to meet all program requirements, as well as the needs of Texas children.

For fiscal year 2022, HHSC conducted enhanced fiscal oversight for the Children’s Advocacy Programs contracts. Enhanced monitoring is an increased level of monitoring beyond the regular monitoring typically used to assess progress of the contractor toward meeting identified goals and outcomes in accordance with contract terms and agency regulations.

To evaluate contractual compliance, HHSC Children’s Advocacy Programs completed contract monitoring activities during fiscal year 2022 for the areas listed in Table 9.

Table 9. Fiscal Year 2022 Contract Monitoring Activities

Contract Monitoring Activity	Texas CASA	CACTX
Administrative Review	Findings	No findings
Programmatic Review	Findings	No findings

5. Contract Effectiveness

Texas CASA

The following CASA accomplishment data was self-reported and provided to HHSC by Texas CASA.

During fiscal year 2022, the Texas CASA network served 23,943 children, and 70 percent of the children with a CASA advocate were reunited with their family or adopted by or had custody granted to a relative. Through the Collaborative Family Engagement (CFE) program, Texas CASA and DFPS have steadily increased family engagement in Texas. In fiscal year 2022, 4,374 children were served through CFE, representing a 30 percent increase from fiscal year 2021. CFE is a shared collaboration between CASA and DFPS, who are jointly trained and staffed to work cases together using a CFE approach, that identifies and engages families as ongoing supportive connections and as permanent placements in some cases. This effort emphasizes family connections to fully engage families.

Texas CASA completed quality assurance reviews of all local CASA programs, and overall compliance was at 97 percent. Using a virtual format, Texas CASA hosted more than 15 trainings of local CASA program board members from every program; the number trained was 478 board members with a 96 percent satisfaction rate. They also hosted another 140 separate trainings/events for local program staff and volunteers, totaling more than 300 hours with a cumulative total of 6,392 attendees in fiscal year 2022.

To address the high turnover being experienced at the local program executive director level, a new initiative to support new local program executive directors, named "New Executive Director University" was created and implemented to support new executive directors during their first two years in the role. Furthermore, Texas CASA expanded their Clergy, CASA, and Community initiative to add an additional 10 programs. The goal of this initiative is to engage Texas' communities of faith in the foster care and CASA volunteer recruitment efforts, as care for children aligns with the foundation of most faith communities. To date, 112 faith-based organizations have been engaged.

CACTX

The following CAC accomplishment data was self-reported and provided to HHSC by CACTX.

CACTX reported that of over 9,500 caregivers surveyed, 97 percent reported they were given information about the services and programs provided by the CAC, and 93 percent reported that CAC staff provided them with resources to support their child and respond to their needs in the days and weeks ahead.

In addition, from more than 1,600 multidisciplinary team survey responses during fiscal year 2022, 79 percent reported that resources given to them by CACs helped improve work on team cases, and 73 percent reported that they could get the information they needed to fulfill their areas of responsibility on cases.

In FY22, CACTX also trained 1,600 CAC staff members and volunteers across 74 trainings, including a new training for mental health clinicians called *Advanced Training in Group Application of Trauma Focused-Cognitive Behavioral Therapy*, expanded *Components for Effecting Clinician Experience and Reducing Trauma*, and multiple trainings of *Child Family Traumatic Stress Intervention*. This is in addition to the more than 13,000 hours of technical assistance provided to CACs, both programmatic and financial.

CACTX reported a 21 percent increase in child sexual exploitation cases in fiscal year 2022 (686 children) over fiscal year 2021 (569 children) and a 1 percent increase in mental health sessions for children in fiscal year 2022 over fiscal year 2021, amounting to a total of 122,802 sessions in FY22. Additional funding appropriated by the 87th Legislature to address mental health waitlists enabled some CACs to eliminate or decrease their mental health waitlists.

These accomplishments are in addition to the successes of other special projects, including CACTX's work with the Bluebonnet Children's Advocacy Center to address the aftermath of the Uvalde elementary school shooting, alignment on a vision for human trafficking response with statewide partners, CACTX's work on the Sexual Assault Survivors' Task Force, and new technical assistance and training resources for Texas CACs.

Conclusion

HHSC is committed to promoting oversight and collaboration with Texas CASA and CACTX. This effort seeks to ensure the protection of abused and neglected children through child and family advocacy, victim support, comprehensive case management, forensic interviews, specialized medical and mental health services, assistance with the legal system, and giving children a voice in the advocacy process. HHSC will continue to work with Texas CASA and CACTX throughout fiscal year 2023 to serve the children of Texas.

Children's Advocacy Programs are dedicated to strengthening relationships with statewide organizations providing children's advocacy services through increased communication efforts, collaborative information sharing, and ongoing technical assistance. The programs will continue to improve service quality by enhancing the contract monitoring process and analyzing new and current data to identify service trends and ensure effective and responsible use of state funding.

List of Acronyms

Acronym	Full Name
CAC	Children's Advocacy Centers
CACTX	Children's Advocacy Centers of Texas
CASA	Court Appointed Special Advocates
CFE	Collaborative Family Engagement
CPS	Child Protective Services
DFPS	Texas Department of Family and Protective Services
HHSC	Health and Human Services Commission