



**Combined Children's
Advocacy Programs and
Contingency for Child
Advocacy Center and Court
Appointed Special Advocate
Grants Report for Fiscal Year
2021**

**As Required by
House Bill 1, 86th Legislature, Regular
Session, 2019 (Article II, Health and Human
Services Commission, Rider 95(e)) and Texas
Family Code, Section 264.608**

**Texas Health and Human Services
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TEXAS
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Executive Summary

The *Combined Children's Advocacy Programs and Contingency for Child Advocacy Center and Court Appointed Special Advocate Grants* report for fiscal year 2021 is submitted in compliance with the 2020-21 General Appropriations Act, [House Bill 1, 86th Legislature, Regular Session, 2019](#) (Article II, Health and Human Services Commission [HHSC], Rider 95(e)) and Texas Family Code [§264.608](#).

Rider 95(e) 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 18 years of age in the protective custody of the Texas Department of Family and Protective Services (DFPS) Child Protective Services (CPS). In fiscal year 2021, 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 2021, 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 95(e) requires HHSC to submit an annual report detailing the expenditures of funds appropriated for children’s advocacy programs within 100 days of the close of each fiscal year to the Governor, Senate Finance Committee, House Appropriations Committee, and Legislative Budget Board (LBB).

The report must include:

- Information demonstrating continuity of service from the previous fiscal year;
- 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; and
- Oversight activities conducted 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 LBB. 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 CPS. HHSC contracts with one statewide organization each to administer services for children's advocacy services and for children's court appointed advocacy services. The statewide organization must be exempt from federal income taxation under Section 501(a) of the Internal Revenue Code of 1986, as outlined in Texas Family Code §§264.409 and 264.603.

HHSC program staff 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 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 Texas Administrative Code (TAC) [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 CPS custody in 219 counties. Texas CASA works to connect each part of the CASA community and empower the local programs to perform at their highest level. 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 help 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 71 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 §264.409.

2. COVID-19 Impact on Texas CASA and CACTX

The COVID-19 pandemic continues to impact Texas CASA and CACTX's training and technical assistance model, local programs' direct service delivery, and access to children experiencing abuse, witnessing violence, and those in the custody of CPS. In response to the pandemic, the statewide organizations continue to adapt to and augment a virtual learning and telehealth platform for local service providers and volunteers. Although the COVID-19 pandemic continues to present challenges to the Children's Advocacy Programs, Texas CASA and CACTX have successfully met the needs of clients and have ensured continuity of services. They remain a consistent presence in the lives of the children they serve and have persisted in innovative ways to improve their advocacy work.

COVID-19 pandemic stay-at-home orders, social distancing requirements, and school closures continued to impact the number and severity of child abuse reports DFPS received. Child abuse victims were exposed to abuse for longer periods of time without a means for help. They had no respite from their abusers due to school closures, and isolation created new opportunities for abuse. Statewide, there was continued unpredictability in the number of child abuse reports being made since the largest sources of abuse reporters – medical professionals and teachers – were not consistently seeing children in-person.

Texas CASA

Texas CASA and local CASAs adjusted to fulfill their role virtually to interact with children, recruit and train volunteers, attend court, conduct family meetings, and gather information. Texas CASA moved events and training to a virtual format and added programming to their website for local programs to access. They trained local programs on maintaining visual contact with children virtually. When health conditions have allowed, some programs have returned to in-person recruiting, training, child visits, and court hearings. However, much of the training and technical assistance Texas CASA provides has been delivered virtually, and much of the work the CASA programs perform remains remote.

Texas CASA also formed a COVID-19 Task Force and developed protocols and processes to assist local CASA programs. School closures and social distancing requirements continue to impact the number of child abuse reports DFPS receives.

There continues to be a decrease in the number of child abuse reports being made since the most prevalent abuse reporters – medical professionals and teachers – were seeing fewer children in-person until near the end of fiscal year 2021. According to DFPS data, there was a 48 percent drop in child abuse reports since the onset of the pandemic and that trend has remained constant through fiscal year 2021. Consequently, the number of children CASA programs served decreased in fiscal year 2021. Texas CASA is preparing for a possible increase in cases which may result from children’s return to school and therefore more in-person contact with school officials and other professionals in the community.

Since many courts have not been able to conduct trials, there continues to be a backlog in court cases which has resulted in the delay in case closures. The volunteers who would normally roll off a case after it closes and serve new children have remained on cases longer as part of this dynamic. Volunteer advocates have also struggled with burnout and the difficulties of remote advocacy the pandemic has introduced, and some have chosen to not continue their advocacy.

CACTX

CACTX continued to adapt and refine what would typically be in-person trainings and statewide gatherings to virtual platforms. As essential workers supporting law enforcement and DFPS, CAC program staff continued to deliver direct client services in-person throughout the pandemic. To supplement in-person services, CAC programs leveraged virtual alternatives and telehealth to ensure clients and multidisciplinary team partners received continuous access to services and support despite dynamic public health challenges. The pandemic has given CACTX and CAC programs the opportunity to successfully test and scale virtual services, trainings, and support which they will continue to leverage to complement in-person offerings and increase statewide access and connectivity.

With an increase in severity and complexity of abuse cases due to the pandemic, including an increase in children presenting with suicidal ideation, CAC programs continue to grapple with a demand for ongoing mental health services that outweighs available resources. CACTX and CAC programs are positioned to expand mental health services and explore new modalities of care that will increase access to mental health services statewide in fiscal year 2022 and beyond. CACTX continued to adapt by distributing education and awareness materials to educate the public on warning signs of abuse when observed in-person or virtually.

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 2021, the Legislature appropriated HHSC an additional \$1,750,000.00 in funding for CASA services, and an additional \$10,000,000.00 in funding for CAC services, per year.

This additional funding was purposed to expand the service capacity and increase the number of children served in both CASA and CAC programs in fiscal years 2020 and 2021.

Table 1. Fiscal Year 2021 Grant Award by Program

| Program | Grant Amount |
|----------------|------------------------|
| CASA | \$14,964,001.00 |
| CAC | \$23,599,004.00 |
| Total | \$38,563,005.00 |

Table 2. Fiscal Year 2021 Grant Award by Financing Method

| Financing Method | Grant Amount |
|--|------------------------|
| General Revenue | \$23,319,661.00 |
| License Plate Trust Fund Account No. 0802 | \$13,500.00 |
| General Revenue – Dedicated Compensation to Victims of Crime Fund No. 0469 | \$10,229,844.00 |
| General Revenue – Dedicated Sexual Assault Program No. 5010 | \$5,000,000.00 |
| Total | \$38,563,005.00 |

Table 3 details unexpended balances for Texas CASA and CACTX that was transferred from fiscal year 2020 to fiscal year 2021, pursuant to Rider 95(c).

Table 3. Unexpended Balance Carryforward Amounts

| Contractor | Unexpended FY20 Balance | Amount Carried Forward to FY21 |
|-------------------|--------------------------------|---------------------------------------|
| Texas CASA | \$473,151.00 | \$473,151.00 |
| CACTX | \$2,142,632.00 | \$2,142,632.00 |

Expenditures

Table 4 details funds expended by Texas CASA for fiscal year 2021.

Table 4. Texas CASA Expenditures

| Texas CASA | Expended | Unexpended Balance | Total |
|---|------------------------|---------------------------|------------------------|
| General Revenue | \$9,835,579.00 | \$0 | \$9,835,579.00 |
| General Revenue - Dedicated Compensation to Victims of Crime Fund No. 0469 | \$5,114,922.00 | \$0 | \$5,114,922.00 |
| License Plate Trust Fund Account No. 0802 | \$13,198.97 | \$301.03 | \$13,500.00 |
| Total | \$14,963,699.97 | \$301.03 | \$14,964,001.00 |

Table 5 details the funds expended by CACTX for fiscal year 2021.

Table 5. CACTX Expenditures

| CACTX | Expended | Unexpended Balance | Total |
|--|------------------------|---------------------------|------------------------|
| General Revenue | \$13,484,082.00 | \$0 | \$13,484,082.00 |
| General Revenue - Dedicated Compensation to Victims of Crime Fund No. 0469 | \$5,000,000.00 | \$0 | \$5,000,000.00 |
| General Revenue – Dedicated Sexual Assault Program Fund No. 5010 | \$5,114,922.00 | \$0 | \$5,114,922.00 |
| Total | \$23,599,004.00 | \$0 | \$23,599,004.00 |

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 6 shows the total amount of administrative expenditures for each contractor and the percentage of the annual legislative appropriation.

Table 6. Administrative Expenses by Total and Percent of Legislative Appropriation

| Contractor | Administrative Expenses | Percent of Legislative Appropriation |
|-------------------|--------------------------------|---|
| Texas CASA | \$1,461,785.87 | 9.77% |
| CACTX | \$2,568,430.86 | 10.88% |

Required Data

Table 7 provides information regarding contracts for both Texas CASA and CACTX.

Table 7. Fiscal Year 2021 Contracts Summary

| | Texas CASA | CACTX |
|--------------------------------------|------------------------|------------------------|
| Contract Term | 2 years | 2 years |
| FY 2021 Total Awarded Amount | \$14,964,001.00 | \$23,599,004.00 |
| Administrative Cap | \$1,795,680.12 | \$2,831,880.48 |
| Actual Administrative Expense | \$1,461,785.87 | \$2,568,430.86 |
| Actual Service Expense | \$13,501,914.10 | \$21,030,573.14 |
| Total Expenditures | \$14,963,699.97 | \$23,599,004.00 |

The fiscal year 2021 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 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 8 details Texas CASA’s fiscal year 2021 performance data. The data for new children served includes the count of unduplicated children served in fiscal year 2021. The data for total children served includes all children served in fiscal year 2021.

Table 8. Fiscal Year 2021 Texas CASA Data

| Data | Total Number |
|----------------------------|---------------------|
| Total Children Served | 28,543 |
| New Children Served | 10,670 |
| Court-Appointed Volunteers | 10,920 |
| New Volunteers | 3,600 |
| Local Programs | 72 |
| Counties Served | 219 |

Table 9 shows CACTX’s fiscal year 2021 performance data. The data for new children served includes the count of unduplicated children served in fiscal year 2021. The data for total children served includes all children served in fiscal year 2021.

Table 9. Fiscal Year 2021 CACTX Data

| Data | Total Number |
|--|---------------------|
| Total Children Served | 68,018 |
| New Children Served | 56,126 |
| Children Receiving Mental Health Services | 23,609 |
| Forensics Interviews Conducted On-site | 47,022 |
| Child Abuse Cases Reviewed by Multidisciplinary Team | 38,039 |
| Training Sessions Provided to Local Advocacy Centers | 169 |
| Local Programs | 71 |
| 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 2021 for both Texas CASA and CACTX.

Contract oversight activities indicated that services are being provided in accordance with programmatic 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 2021, 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 2021 for the areas listed in Table 10. Both contractors did not have any findings.

Table 10. Fiscal Year 2021 Contract Monitoring Activities

| Contract Monitoring Activity | Texas CASA | CACTX |
|-------------------------------------|-------------------|--------------|
| Policies and Procedures | No findings | No findings |
| Scheduled Trainings | No findings | No findings |
| Local program monitoring reviews | No findings | No findings |
| Programmatic Review | No 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 2021 the Texas CASA network served 28,543 children, a decrease of 2 percent from fiscal year 2020 and slightly less than the 4 percent decrease in statewide child removals. Eighty-one percent of the children with a CASA advocate were reunited with their family or adopted by or had custody granted to a relative. Specifically, 43 percent of children served by a CASA volunteer were reunited with their family as compared to 33 percent reunification statewide.

Through the Collaborative Family Engagement (CFE) program, Texas CASA and DFPS have steadily increased family engagement in Texas. In fiscal year 2021, 3,355 children were served through CFE, representing a 48 percent increase from fiscal year 2020. CFE is a shared collaboration between CASA and CPS—who are jointly trained and staffed to work cases together using a CFE approach which identifies and engages families as ongoing supportive connections and as permanent placements in some cases. This effort emphasizes family connections to fully engage families.

A new way of delivering CFE was also developed and piloted in four CASA programs during this contract period. Early CFE (ECFE) focuses on the time when CASA is first appointed to a case and the way in which CASA engages families in this early timeframe. CASA utilized ECFE to work with DFPS Child Protective Investigations (CPI) to engage with families and to learn about connections that could be maintained for the child involved in the case. This pilot was successful with increases in collaboration and connections achieved. All ECFE pilot participants reported positive feedback, and this early engagement work will become a part of the CFE model in fiscal year 2022.

Trafficking and commercial sexual exploitation of children are other areas where Texas CASA is supporting local programs by developing an advocacy framework which volunteers will use with children and youth who are at risk of or who have experienced trafficking or commercial sexual exploitation. This framework, called

CASA ACTs (Anti-Child Trafficking), will be further developed in fiscal year 2022 in collaboration with Dallas CASA.

CACTX

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

The Texas CAC network continued to expand its official service area in fiscal year 2021 by adding one new county for a total of 211 counties. Despite the continued pandemic impacting child abuse reporting, CAC programs served more new children in fiscal year 2021 than ever before, serving 56,126, or 7 percent more, new children than in fiscal year 2020. Additionally, CACTX supported local CAC program capacity by adding therapists, family advocates, case managers, and multidisciplinary team support and coordination. To ensure child victims of crime continue to receive care and services during the COVID-19 pandemic, CAC programs continued providing mental health services both in-person and via telehealth platforms and conducting forensic interviews virtually, when necessary.

Through both in-person and virtual modalities, CAC programs provided 121,667 trauma-informed mental health sessions to 23,609 children and 41,641 mental health sessions to 9,316 adults. CAC programs reviewed 252,398 child abuse reports from the DFPS Statewide Intake Abuse Hotline, and 79,725 cases received CAC multidisciplinary team case coordination services. Additionally, 62,500 families received victim advocacy and case management services.

CACTX trained 2,577 CAC and multidisciplinary team partners through 169 trainings adapted for virtual delivery including new training offerings such as the first statewide Forensic Nurse Examiner Case Review and continued guidance on adapting CAC services during the pandemic such as providing mental health services via telehealth platforms and secondary trauma and resiliency trainings. CACTX continued partnerships with the Texas Education Agency and Department of State Health Services and collaborated with other key stakeholders and state agencies on various task forces including the Sexual Assault Survivors Task Force and Tex-TRAC (Tele-forensic Remote Assistance Center). Additionally, CACTX led and transitioned the Statewide Multidisciplinary Team into Texas' Children's Justice Act Statewide Multidisciplinary Task Force.

CACTX and CAC programs in 11 counties partnered with the Office of the Governor's Child Sex Trafficking Prevention Unit, DFPS Human Trafficking Team,

and other community service providers to launch and sustain care coordination teams for child sex trafficking cases in Texas. CACTX and CAC programs in nine additional counties are finalizing child sex trafficking care coordination protocols for launch in fiscal year 2022.

Conclusion

HHSC is committed to promoting 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 2022 to serve the children of Texas.

Children's Advocacy Programs are dedicated to strengthening relationships with statewide organizations providing children's advocacy programs 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 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 |
| CPI | Child Protective Investigations |
| CPS | Child Protective Services |
| DFPS | Texas Department of Family and Protective Services |
| ECFE | Early Collaborative Family Engagement |
| HHSC | Health and Human Services Commission |
| LBB | Legislative Budget Board |
| Texas CASA | Texas Court Appointed Special Advocates |