

By: West

S.B. No. 661

A BILL TO BE ENTITLED

AN ACT

relating to the creation of the Office of Youth Health and Safety.

BE IT ENACTED BY THE LEGISLATURE OF THE STATE OF TEXAS:

SECTION 1. Chapter 523, Government Code, is amended by adding Subchapter I to read as follows:

SUBCHAPTER I. OFFICE OF YOUTH HEALTH AND SAFETY

Sec. 523.0401. DEFINITIONS. In this subchapter:

(1) "Board" means the Board of Youth Health and Safety.

(2) "Child" means an individual 10 years of age or older and younger than 18 years of age who is under the jurisdiction of a juvenile court.

(3) "Office" means the Office of Youth Health and Safety.

Sec. 523.0402. OFFICE OF YOUTH HEALTH AND SAFETY. The executive commissioner shall maintain an office of youth health and safety within the commission's Office of Forensic Coordination with the goal of:

(1) promoting trauma-responsive and culturally informed services for children engaging in delinquent conduct in a manner that supports the child's successful transition to adulthood; and

(2) ensuring children become responsible, thriving, and engaged members of their communities.

1 Sec. 523.0403. COMPOSITION OF BOARD; PRESIDING OFFICER.

2 (a) The board is the governing body of the office.

3 (b) The board is composed of the following 21 members or
4 their designees:

5 (1) the executive commissioner;

6 (2) the chief officer of the commission's Medicaid and
7 CHIP services division;

8 (3) the deputy executive commissioner of the
9 Intellectual and Developmental Disability and Behavioral Health
10 Services Department;

11 (4) the director of the Early Childhood Education
12 Division at the Texas Education Agency;

13 (5) the following members appointed by the executive
14 commissioner:

15 (A) a member of the judiciary;

16 (B) an attorney with experience in defending
17 civil rights cases;

18 (C) a member of the Texas Judicial Commission on
19 Mental Health;

20 (D) a faculty member from the medical school at
21 The University of Texas Health Science Center at San Antonio;

22 (E) a licensed trauma-informed youth counselor;

23 (F) an education advocate;

24 (G) two culturally responsive juvenile justice
25 advocates;

26 (H) a culturally responsive youth mental health
27 advocate;

1 (I) a harm reduction advocate; and

2 (J) a representative of the Texas Correctional
3 Office on Offenders with Medical or Mental Impairments; and

4 (6) the following members appointed by the executive
5 commissioner from recommendations made by the presiding officer:

6 (A) a child welfare advocate;

7 (B) two youth advocates;

8 (C) two individuals formerly committed to a
9 juvenile secure correctional facility who are able to serve as
10 credible messengers for detained youth; and

11 (D) a mitigation specialist.

12 (c) Board members appointed under Subsections (b)(5) and
13 (6) serve staggered six-year terms, with the terms of five or six
14 members expiring on February 1 of each odd-numbered year.

15 (d) The executive commissioner shall designate a member of
16 the board as the presiding officer to serve in that capacity at the
17 pleasure of the executive commissioner.

18 Sec. 523.0404. PLAN. (a) The office shall develop a plan to
19 improve the juvenile justice system under the authority of the
20 office.

21 (b) The plan must include a detailed list of procedures and
22 strategies to:

23 (1) not later than September 1, 2028:

24 (A) end commitments of children to
25 post-adjudication secure correctional facilities operated by the
26 Texas Juvenile Justice Department;

27 (B) significantly reduce the population of

1 children currently committed to post-adjudication secure
2 correctional facilities operated by the Texas Juvenile Justice
3 Department;

4 (C) establish infrastructure in each county in
5 this state to provide alternative services related to delinquency
6 prevention and intervention, including alternative evidence-based
7 safe, local, and supportive placements for children who are not
8 able to stay at home;

9 (D) establish secure placement options for
10 children who are determined by a court to present a serious risk of
11 harm to self or others;

12 (E) increase local, evidence-based delinquency
13 responses and interventions in communities and schools; and

14 (F) end racial and disability disparities for
15 children in the juvenile justice system; and

16 (2) conduct a study on the feasibility of a staggered
17 closure of all post-adjudication secure correctional facilities
18 operated by the Texas Juvenile Justice Department.

19 (c) In developing the plan, the office shall consult with
20 experts and interested parties, including juvenile probation
21 departments.

22 (d) Not later than January 1, 2027, the office shall submit
23 a copy of the plan to the governor, the lieutenant governor, the
24 speaker of the house of representatives, and each member of the
25 legislature.

26 (e) This section expires September 1, 2032.

27 SECTION 2. Not later than the 60th day after the effective

1 date of this Act, the executive commissioner of the Health and Human
2 Services Commission shall appoint members to the Board of Youth
3 Health and Safety in accordance with Section 523.0403, Government
4 Code, as added by this Act. In appointing the initial members of
5 the board under this section, the executive commissioner shall
6 designate six members for terms expiring February 1, 2027, six
7 members for terms expiring February 1, 2029, and five members for
8 terms expiring February 1, 2031.

9 SECTION 3. This Act takes effect September 1, 2025.