

**HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES  
COMPILATION OF PUBLIC COMMENTS**

Submitted to the Committee on Youth Health & Safety, Select  
For HB 1898

Compiled on: Monday, March 20, 2023 10:35 PM

Note: Comments received by the committee reflect only the view of the individual(s) submitting the comment, who retain sole responsibility for the content of the comment. Neither the committee nor the Texas House of Representatives takes a position on the views expressed in any comment. The committee compiles the comments received for informational purposes only and does not exercise any editorial control over comments.

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Hearing Date: March 20, 2023 2:30 PM - or upon final adjourn./recess or bill referral if permission granted

Sarah Berel-Harrop  
Self / Seminarian, Intern Minister & Director of Religious Education  
Farmers Branch, TX

I support this bill. There are not enough mental health beds for children & youth. When I was an intern chaplain at Children's hospital in 2020, there were kids waiting for over a week in the emergency room for a placement.

Also I hope that the grant program would include support for innovation in supportive care for transitions (hospital to residential care /PHP / IOP / Step down and then to home care). In my experience as a parent of a child that lives with mental illness, those transition times are very difficult. Family therapy is essential as well. Kids change in treatment, but if the family system doesn't also change, skills learned in treatment are not supported in the family system. This seems to me as part of the work of supporting transitions.

Andrea Sparks  
Buckner International  
Dallas, TX

Buckner International supports HB 1898 because it increases behavioral and mental health options for children and families. The families we serve are in dire need of more options for these kinds of services.

Aaryce Hayes  
Disability Rights Texas  
Austin, TX

Disability Rights Texas supports this attempt to increase the capacity to provide mental and behavioral health care services to children in Texas. We recommend specific target outcomes be delineated to use in the monitoring and evaluation of the use of the money awarded under the grant program. Aaryce Hayes, Policy Specialist Disability Rights Texas.

EVE Margolis  
self  
Austin, TX

I support this bill. There is too little support for children in need. Our children are our responsibility, we must care for them with all the resources we have.

Meredith Cooke  
Texas Children's Hospital  
Houston, TX

On behalf of Texas Children's Hospital, we thank you for the opportunity to provide comments regarding youth mental health needs and services in the State of Texas, in support of House Bill 1898.

We see the mental health crisis at Texas Children's Hospital at every single entry point into our system – the Emergency Centers, outpatient clinics, and in our pediatrician practices. Starting with the highest level of acuity, the number of children and adolescents presenting to our Emergency Centers with acute behavioral health needs including aggressive episodes, suicidal ideation, and suicide attempts continues to climb astronomically. Prior to the pandemic, we typically saw between 50 and 100 behavioral health patients per month across our three emergency centers. We now typically see between 400 and 450 per month. Our physician experts are often asked if the crisis is receding as life “returns to normal” and we learn to live with COVID-19. Unfortunately, the answer is no. In January 2023, we saw over 500 behavioral health patients, which is our highest number of youth presenting to our ECs with mental health crisis ever.

No matter how they enter the Texas Children's system, these children and adolescents wait for services - whether it's waiting in the EC on an acute medical floor for a psychiatric inpatient bed, or waiting in line for a clinician to become available for assessment or treatment of less severe concerns on an outpatient basis.

In early 2021, Texas Children's Hospital formed a dedicated Behavioral Health Task Force to address the surging behavioral and developmental health needs of our patients. Its workgroups address strategies across the continuum of care to ensure comprehensive, safe, and dignified care for patients and families.

Specific priorities in need of financial support include expanding access to high quality outpatient care, opportunities to embed behavioral health services into the community, developing specialized teams with increased capacity to respond to crises in the community, developing new Intensive Outpatient and Partial Hospitalization programs for different populations, and improving care of suicidal patients. The goal is to meet patients and families where they are and to help them address behavioral and mental health issues as early as possible at each stage of the diagnosis and treatment continuum.

It is vital that the Committee support, favorably consider and vote out House Bill 1898 by State Representative Jacey Jetton. The one-time grant funding that hospitals would receive from the passage of this bill and its contingency rider would positively benefit the youth in our communities that are desperately needing access to behavioral health services. The State of Texas needs a variety of solutions, implemented across a variety of settings, by a variety of professionals, to youth with varying levels of need.

Shariq Ghani, Executive Director  
Minaret Foundation  
Richmond, TX

Establishing a grant program to fund institutions that better the health of children in Texas is a terrific step forward in providing the tools necessary towards their development. We ask that you provide favorable consideration for HB 1898.