

**HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES  
COMPILATION OF PUBLIC COMMENTS**

Submitted to the Committee on International Relations & Economic Development  
For HB 1979

Compiled on: Tuesday, April 11, 2023 10:42 AM

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Hearing Date: April 11, 2023 8:00 AM

David Feigen, Director of Early Learning Policy  
Texans Care for Children  
Austin, TX

HB 1979 is a thoughtful way for the state to maximize existing funding. It improves child care services for working families and child care programs. It will help TWC and the Legislature better track taxpayer investments. TWC is responsible for overseeing billions of federal dollars in child care funding, providing financial assistance to working parents, and improving the quality of early childhood education in our state. To implement these funds, we rely on the 28 Local Workforce Development Boards across the state. Boards in different communities have adopted innovative local approaches to serving eligible families and programs. However, the basic state policies to support these efforts should evolve to improve outcomes for kids and families. Too often, basic services families receive depend on where they live and go to work.

To boil it down, HB 1979:

- Provides standard data on the effectiveness of the state's investments, including waitlist and enrollment trends.
- It ensures websites provide the information families and child care providers need to access services, including information about finding quality child care, info on the state's quality rating and improvement system, Texas Rising Star, and accessible contact information.
- It establishes that Board membership includes child care expertise, as child care is the vast majority of the funding these Boards manage.
- And it modernizes onerous state performance targets that limit the ability of Boards to effectively address pressing local needs.

We appreciate Rep. Raney for his leadership on this issue and for introducing this excellent bill.

Cynthia Pearson  
Day Nursery of Abilene  
Abilene, TX

Thank you for the opportunity to provide written support of HB 1979. More direct child care expertise and business knowledge needs to be at the table for these discussions and votes on all local WFS boards. This recommendation is a part of the Workforce Strategic Plan for the Child Care Workforce which was designated as as part of HB619 and submitted to TWC in December 2022 and January 2023. Furthermore there is no fiscal note and falls within the related Government Code which describes WFS board make up. This recommendation has been made before and just makes sense due to the funds overseen by TWC and WFS boards. There would also be a direct benefit to the child care industry and workforce. The contribution child care makes in keeping Texans working was illuminated during the COVID 19 pandemic and emphasized further when deemed an “Essential” industry by the Texas Governor. Business leaders, city officials, early education advocates among others that included availability of child care in discussion of limits to people’s ability to return to work. This fact has not been limited to just Texas but also in all 50 of our United States. The contributions made by the child care industry have had a notable impact on keeping employees employed and businesses functioning ultimately adding to the economic development of each community, state, and our entire nation. In addition the value of high quality early education plays supporting school readiness has become more widely recognized as not only a necessity but crucial for the long-term benefit of our state.

Child care funding as you know is also the largest line item in the TWC budget and of those budgets overseen in each of the 28 Workforce Solutions Board (WFS) areas yet representation of direct child care industry knowledge on WFS boards is miniscule. The language in the rules describing WFS board membership allows one board position and anyone with “ child care expertise” to represent providers on WFS boards. This definition is way too broad. It can also be said with almost complete certainty that virtually every CCS provider in the state has no idea who represents them on WFS boards or even that there is representation of child care on WFS boards, how to access or be involved in the critical decision-making by WFS board that impacts this industry.

To reflect the contribution made by child care as a true solution to workforce, providers should have more and better representation on local WFS boards. Their voice should be a part of the conversation of each of these boards’ work. No other workforce program impacts children, parents/families/employees, employers, businesses, and communities quite like that of child care. The economic development impact of child care as a vital support for working parents is noted as essential to consider the value of this investment in the overall economy of Texas.

Brooks Jones, CBDO  
Christian Preschool Centers  
Lubbock, TX

I am in favor of this change for the Texas Workforce Commission

Destiny Perez  
Christian Preschool Centers  
Lubbock, TX

I am in favor of this change in the TWC. Please help his go through

Kaye Boehning  
Tomorrow's Promise  
Huntsville, TX

I am in Huntsville, Tx. In our area we have three different Workforce boards that we serve (Gulf Coast, Deep East Texas and Brazos Valley). Each board has a different set of rules and regulations that must be followed. Some of them seem to be well organized but others do not. Child Care centers should have some say in the policies that are enacted by these boards. For example, one board has us send in attendance each week for every child, but doesn't give us a list of current children that are eligible for subsidies and pays us the least amount of money. Another board requests that we notify them if a child is absent more than five days and they have a database where we can look up the child's name, expiration date for funding and the parent fee that we are to collect. They pay us the most money. The third board has a similar system in place, has more trainings and informational meetings, but pays us less than the second one. The first one has almost no waiting list, the second a wait list of about a year and the third is about three months that a parent has to wait to be approved for funding. If child care centers had at least a seat at the table, then we could explain how the policies affect us.

Chelsea Jeffery  
Early Matters Dallas / The Commit Partnership  
Dallas, TX

Access to high-quality, affordable childcare propels Texas' economic development as it enables families to go to work while simultaneously providing strong learning foundations during critical early learning years.

HB 1979 would support local workforce development boards in utilizing current dollars more effectively and efficiently through the publishing of consistent, transparent data. While TWC currently collects data around the number of children served for federal reporting purposes and is making strides to strengthen data collection and reporting processes, the local collection and public reporting still varies across the 28 boards, creating challenges to assess the effectiveness of services and the return on our investments. With local boards publishing and disaggregating quality and access data by zip code across regions, the state can better identify best practices and support local innovation.

In our region organizations are connecting families on the child care scholarship waitlist with nearby, open high-quality PreK and Head Start seats and vice versa. We're collaboratively using data to ensure all sources of public funding are used most efficiently to provide services, preventing duplication where it exists and filling gaps where needed. This is something that could be replicated across the state under HB 1979.

The bill also helps identify effective practices and regional bright spots like "which regions are seeing the greatest success in improving outcomes and what are the practices and investments driving those outcomes?" Policymakers, local boards, and other organizations can identify gaps, learn from bright spots statewide, codify what's working, and scale it to other regions. Within childcare it's difficult to identify those bright spots, like we can in other parts of the education ecosystem, because of the lack of aligned, consistent, geographically disaggregated data.

This data also would improve the system for providers and families. HB 1979 creates greater flexibility in board performance targets allowing localities to allocate existing funds towards specific, data-driven needs of their region. Currently, boards are funded based on a simplistic performance target for the number of eligible children served, failing to fully recognize complexities like higher costs of infant care, increased quality, care in childcare deserts, or care outside of traditional hours.

In 2018, Early Matters Dallas conducted a study with Boston Consulting Group and found that 65% of Dallas County zip codes had insufficient infant and toddler seats to meet demand, costing our region \$2B in additional GDP and \$120M in annual sales tax revenue. HB 1979 would allow for regions to create customized performance targets to implement solutions for local challenges and further the economic development of our state.

HB 1979 will scale systems that promote greater flexibility, transparency, and support for how taxpayer funds are used.

Wendy Uptain

Early Matters

Dallas, TX

The Texas Workforce Commission (TWC) is responsible for stewarding over \$7 billion in FY2022, with over 80% of those dollars tagged for child care services programs. Primarily federal funds, they are distributed via 28 Local Workforce Development Boards (LWDBs). LWDBs have critical responsibilities to help low-income working families access child care services, allocate federal child care funding, and support local initiatives to improve the quality and sustainability of child care in their regions. Boards in different communities have adopted innovative approaches to serve eligible families and child care programs, however, state policy has not evolved to maximize effectiveness and improve outcomes.

HB 1979/SB 1844 would:

**Provide performance target customization:** LWDBs are funded based on only one state-required performance target – the average number of children served by scholarship per day. The target does not account for the higher costs associated with infant care, high-quality care, care in child care deserts, or care during non-traditional hours. Increasing target flexibility will allow local boards the option to allocate funding for specific data-driven needs in their regions.

**Publish transparent and consistent data:** The Texas Workforce Commission collects a lot of data from LWDBs regarding the provision of child care. However, the collection and reporting practices of Boards can vary, which leads to stakeholders struggling to assess the effectiveness of services and investments. Creating a standard for publishing data will result in better-informed decision-making for children and families.

**Expand Boards' Child Care Expertise:** Across the state, LWDB membership ranges from 24 to 50 members and current statute only requires one member to have child care expertise. On average, this means child care expertise makes up <4% of the total membership, despite child care funding making up one of the largest portions of each LWDB's budget. Requiring boards' membership composition to increase representation of members with child care expertise will better inform the use of taxpayer funds.

**Ensure websites have accessible information:** The amount and quality of information on websites for parents and providers varies dramatically across the state. Some include details about the importance of quality child care and the TRS rating system with instructions on how to apply for subsidy scholarships, while others lack the ability for parents to track their applications and are missing basic contact information to direct their questions. Consumer-friendly websites will better serve parents and providers with the basic information they need to access quality child care in their region.