

**HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES
COMPILATION OF PUBLIC COMMENTS**

Submitted to the Committee on Human Services
For HB 3396

Compiled on: Tuesday, April 1, 2025 5:22 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.

Hearing Date: April 1, 2025 8:00 AM

Kelsee Jones, Executive Director
High Sky Children's Ranch
Midland, TX

Chair Hull and Committee Members,

My name is Kelsee Jones. I serve as the Executive Director of High Sky Children's Ranch. I appreciate the opportunity to testify in support of House Bill 3396

At High Sky, we are dedicated to healing abused children and promoting family wholeness through a continuum of care. We provide prevention and early intervention services across 33 Texas counties, offer community counseling, and deliver therapeutic services to children and families in the child welfare system. We also recruit and support foster and adoptive families; provide emergency shelter for foster youth; operate a home for teen boys to teach life skills; and assist young adults who have aged out of foster care.

I am writing to provide testimony in support of HB 3396 from the perspective of children, caregivers, and foster care providers. This bill addresses the urgent healthcare crisis faced by foster children in rural Texas. Despite having medical, vision, dental, and mental health providers in our community, a lack of in-network professionals credentialed with Superior STAR Health leaves essential services inaccessible and inadequate. Caregivers face unclear and burdensome approval processes for out-of-network care, leading to harmful delays and adding stress to already overburdened foster families.

For example, one caregiver recently struggled to secure out-of-network endodontic care for a teenage boy in urgent need because the nearest in-network provider was over 500 miles away. Routine services like dental care often require month-long waits, while allied health and mental health services have even longer delays. Our community's two in-network optometrists accept only a limited number of Medicaid patients each month. Even our Foster Care Center of Excellence, as designated by Superior, struggles with extremely limited availability. When caregivers are able to establish care, children frequently see a different Resident at each visit—disrupting the continuity of care necessary for trauma-informed treatment that helps abused and neglected children heal. Superior STAR Health asserts that their network meets requirements, but the reality for foster families is far different. They are often unable to find timely, appropriate care or access to trusted, qualified providers.

This bill offers a practical solution to ensure timely, equitable healthcare for foster children, allowing medical consenters, other than DFPS, to assume financial responsibility for out-of-network care when in-network options are unavailable or inadequate.

This simple change empowers foster families to access necessary care while protecting DFPS from financial liability.

Without HB 3396, foster children will continue to face delays, and foster families may be discouraged from accepting placements due to healthcare barriers.

Foster families are stepping up to care for Texas' most vulnerable children. They should not face unnecessary obstacles to getting the care these children need.