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HOUSE BILLS 1349 & 1352

Dear Members of the Committee,

Thank you for allowing me the opportunity to submit written testimony in support of House Bills (H.B.) 1349 & 1352 by Representative Vaught, which would (respectively) provide guidelines and standards for training juvenile case managers, and require them to report to the judiciary rather than the municipal court clerk.

PROBLEM

In 2001, the Texas Legislature passed a bill (now §45.056 of the Code of Criminal Procedure) to enable judges from commissioners courts, or the municipal or Justice of the Peace (“JP”) courts, to hire a juvenile case manager. However, there are currently no requirements or standards for educating and training those filling these positions. Additionally, many of the juvenile case managers have come to fill more of an administrative, rather than a problem-solving, role, as was originally intended by lawmakers. This is due in part to the management and reporting structure, where juvenile case managers have reported to the clerk rather than the judge of the municipal court. Without the proper training and appropriate management structure, juvenile case managers cannot effectively fill their intended role as a bridge between the municipal or JP courts and the juvenile court.

BACKGROUND

The juvenile case manager position was created as a way to address the high volume of juveniles sent to municipal and JP courts for truancy, traffic violations, and other fine-only Class C misdemeanors not covered by the juvenile courts. As noted in an op-ed in the *Austin American-Statesman* by Austin Municipal Court Judge John Vasquez:

In Travis County Justice of the Peace Courts, more than 7,000 criminal cases are filed annually against children for not attending school. For many of these youths, timely and effective court intervention is desperately needed. But their cases move through the system much too slowly. Months may pass between the date of the alleged offense and the first court appearance. The Travis County Justice of the Peace Courts and the Austin Municipal Court are high-volume operations, easily processing more than 300,000 cases annually. Little time can be spared for juvenile offenses.¹

In order to effectively address the problems and needs demonstrated by court-involved youth, the municipal and JP courts sought additional access to the breadth of programs and resources provided by the juvenile court. Rather than replicate already existing service-delivery mechanisms, the juvenile case manager position was created as a bridge between the municipal/JP court and the juvenile court. The role of a juvenile case manager is to ensure that each individual youth processed through the municipal or JP court receives an assessment and access to needed services as soon as s/he exhibits delinquent conduct.

SOLUTION: SUPPORT H.B. 1349 AND H.B. 1352 BY REPRESENTATIVE VAUGHT

- **H.B. 1349 would facilitate direct communication between juvenile judges and juvenile case managers and cut down on unnecessary administrative burdens that distract juvenile case managers from their important role as a bridge between the municipal or Justice of the Peace courts and the juvenile court.**
- **H.B. 1352 would provide juvenile case managers with the necessary skills and education to effectively address the needs and problems of youth who are under the jurisdiction of the municipal or Justice of the Peace court systems.**

¹ Scott Henson, “Muni Judge: System Failing Youth Offenders,” *Grits for Breakfast*, <http://gritsforbreakfast.blogspot.com/2005/09/muni-judge-system-failing-youth.html>