



February 2026

# Pre-Petition Legal Representation Survey Report

*In Partnership with  
The Texas Indigent Defense Commission*



SUPREME COURT OF TEXAS PERMANENT JUDICIAL  
COMMISSION FOR CHILDREN, YOUTH AND FAMILIES

The material in this report should not be construed as an advisory or ruling issued by the Supreme Court of Texas or any other court on specific cases or legal issues. Contributions to this report are solely intended to address the improvement of the law, the legal system, and the administration of justice related to child welfare cases.



# Table of Contents

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I. Introduction.....	4
II. Roles.....	5
III. Years of Experience in Child Welfare.....	6
IV. Primary Area of Practice & Geographic Area.....	7
V. Defining Pre-Petition Legal Representation.....	8
VI. Top Legal Issues.....	9
VII. Effective Models.....	10
VIII. Identifying the Need.....	12
IX. Current Availability.....	14
X. Community Capacity.....	16
XI. Concerns.....	17
XII. Support.....	18
XIII. Conclusion.....	19
Appendix.....	20

A photograph of a young child with long, light-colored hair running through a field of tall grass. The child is wearing a light-colored t-shirt and is captured in motion, with their hair blowing in the wind. The background is a soft-focus field of green grass under a bright sky.

# I. Introduction

Each year in the United States, many families are involved in child welfare matters outside the court system. There is growing awareness across the nation of the need for pre-petition legal representation for families involved in child welfare matters to encourage stability, promote safety, and prevent the need for involvement in the court system. In partnership with the Texas Indigent Defense Commission, the Children’s Commission Legal Representation Committee developed a survey to gather information about the availability and need for pre-petition legal representation in Texas.

The purpose of this survey was to better understand the landscape of pre-petition legal representation services for Texas children and families who are at risk of involvement with the Department of Family & Protective Services (DFPS). The scope of this survey was limited to scenarios where no cause of action has been filed by DFPS in a court and there is no statutory right to counsel.

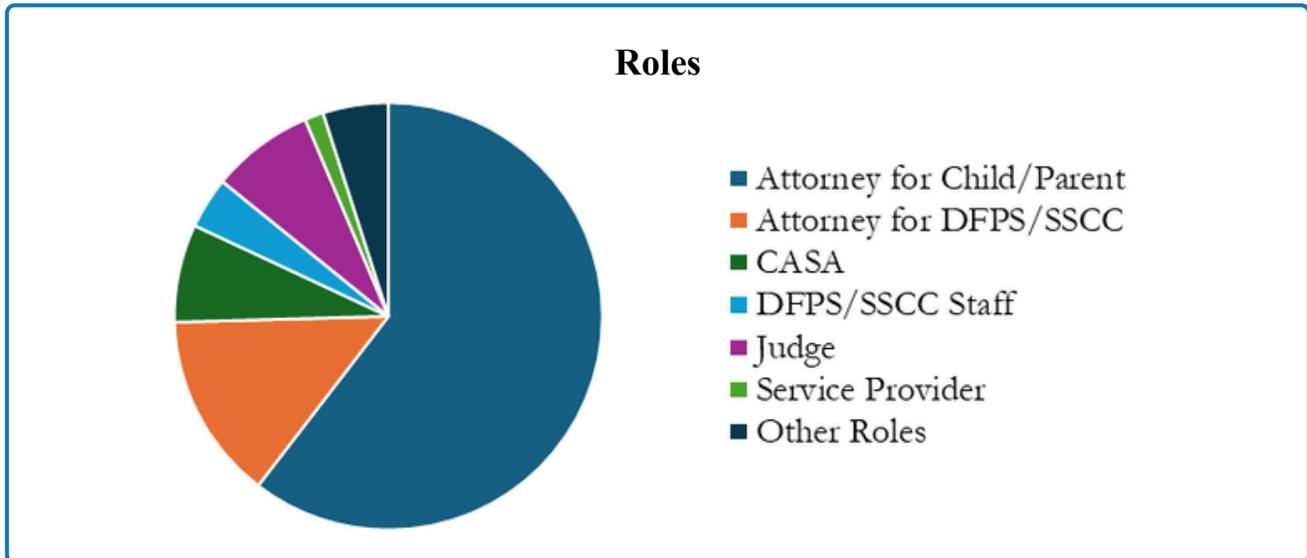
The survey was designed for judges, attorneys who represent parents and children, attorneys who represent DFPS/Single Source Continuum Contractors (SSCC), Court Appointed Special Advocates (CASA), DFPS/SSCC staff, service providers, and others with knowledge of the Texas child welfare system. The survey opened on September 2, 2025, and closed on October 15, 2025. The survey yielded 322 responses with a varying number of responses to each question, as respondents were not required to answer all questions on the survey.

Narrative survey responses are included throughout this report. Responses were minimally edited for clarity, consolidation of similar feedback, removal of unrelated commentary, redaction of identifying details, and to conform with grammar conventions. All narrative responses included throughout this report are referenced in italics.

Please note that any resource materials or other written contributions provided by the Children's Commission should not be read as an advisory issued by the Supreme Court of Texas or any other court. Contributions to this report are not rulings on specific cases or legal issues but are solely intended to address the improvement of the law, the legal system, and the administration of justice related to child welfare cases.

## II. Roles

Individuals in various roles responded to the survey, with a broad representation across disciplines and areas of knowledge.

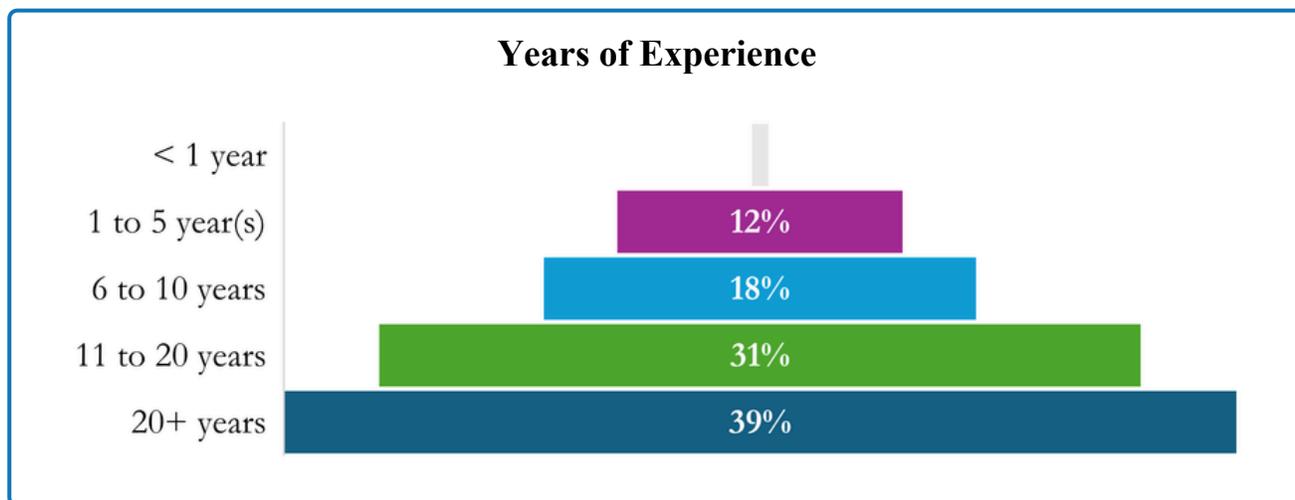


The majority (60%) of survey respondents were attorneys who represent children and parents. The next largest group (14%) of respondents was attorneys for DFPS and SSCCs. For individuals who responded as “Other,” the following additional roles were reported:

- *Retired Attorney for DFPS/SSCC and Child/Parent*
- *Legal Aid Hotline Attorney*
- *Non-Profit*
- *Attorney for Family Members/Kinship*
- *Court Coordinator*
- *Mediator*
- *Parent Liaison/Advocate*
- *Former Justice*
- *Legal Assistant*
- *Clinical Consultant*

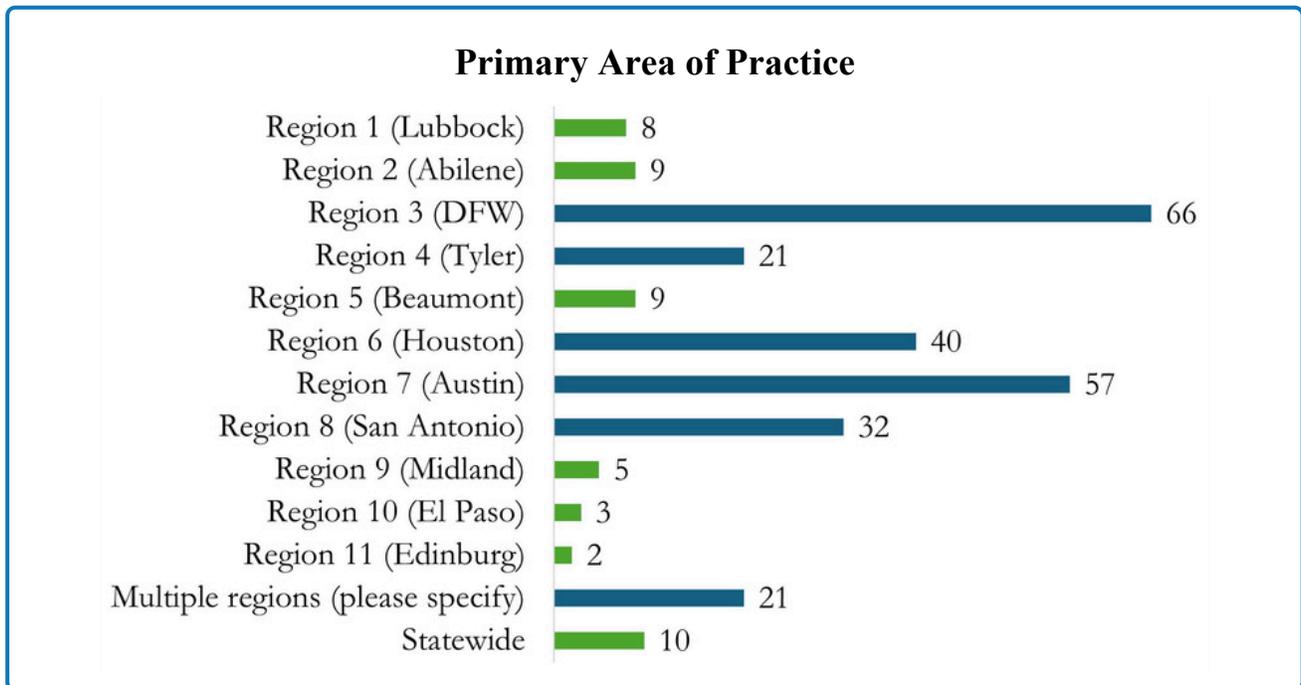
### III. Years of Experience in Child Welfare

Respondents reflected significant familiarity with the child welfare system, with 70% reporting over a decade of experience.



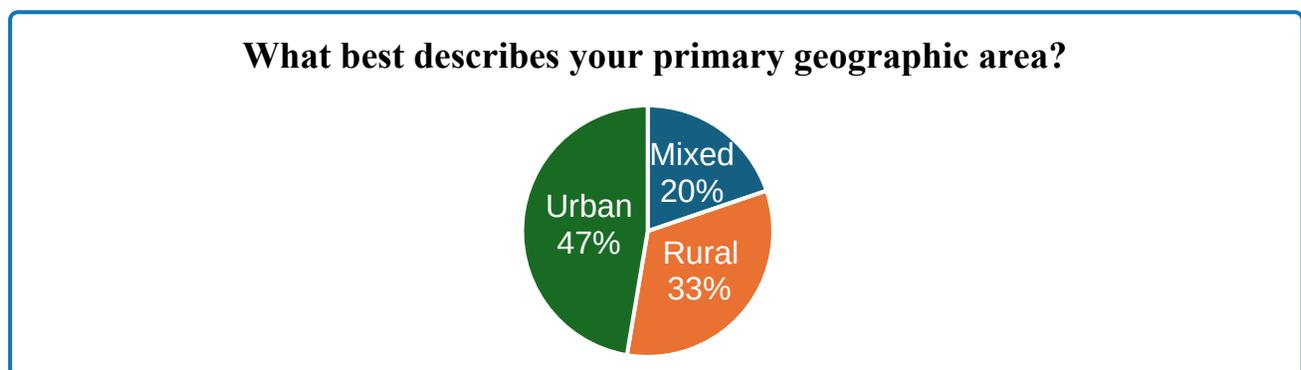
# IV. Primary Area of Practice & Geographic Area

Respondents also represented the broad geography of Texas, with at least two responses from each DFPS region of the State. Areas with fewer than ten survey responses are represented in green on the chart; regions with more than ten responses appear in blue.



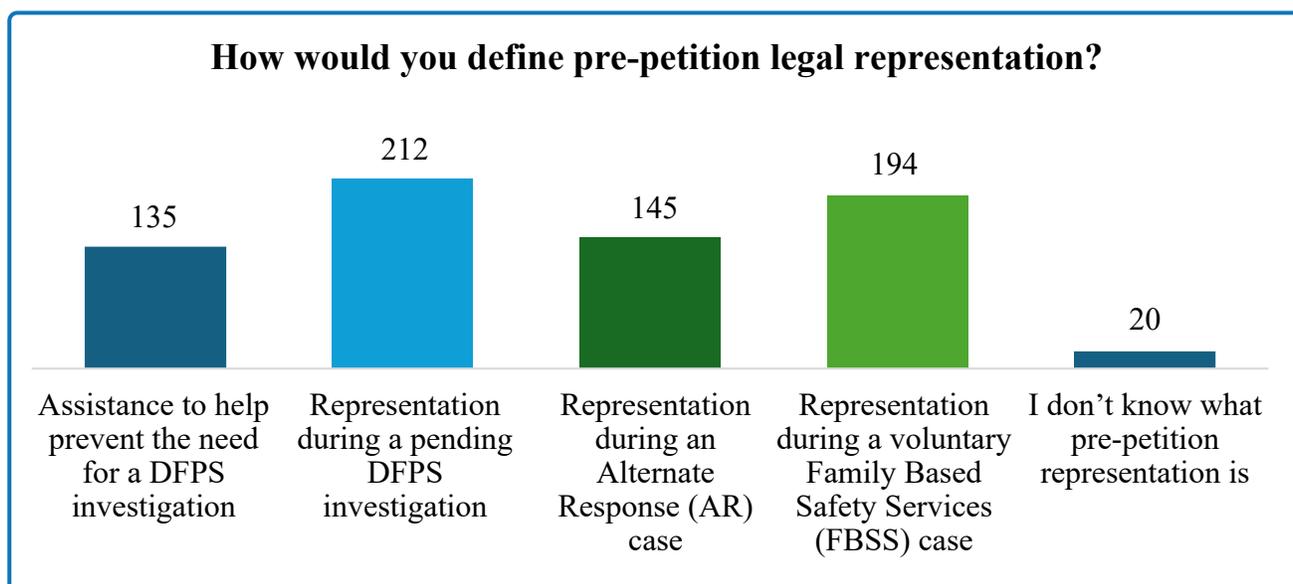
The responses also represented urban and rural communities, as well as a mix of both. Almost half (47%) of the responses came from urban areas. To clarify the term “geographic area,” the following definitions were provided:

- Mixed (e.g., El Paso and surrounding rural counties)
- Rural (counties with population under 100,000)
- Urban (e.g., San Antonio)



# V. Defining Pre-Petition Legal Representation

To help reach a common understanding of what pre-petition legal representation is, the survey elicited perceptions about the breadth and nature of this type of legal work. Pre-petition work is new and emerging in the child welfare field and is not consistently defined. Obtaining answers regarding perceptions about what pre-petition work is will assist in determining future needs. Respondents were asked how they would define pre-petition legal representation and were able to select all applicable responses. The most common response was representation during a pending DFPS investigation (212 responses), followed by representation during a voluntary Family-Based Safety Services (FBSS) case (194 responses), an Alternative Response (AR) case (145 responses), and preventing the need for a DFPS investigation (135 responses).

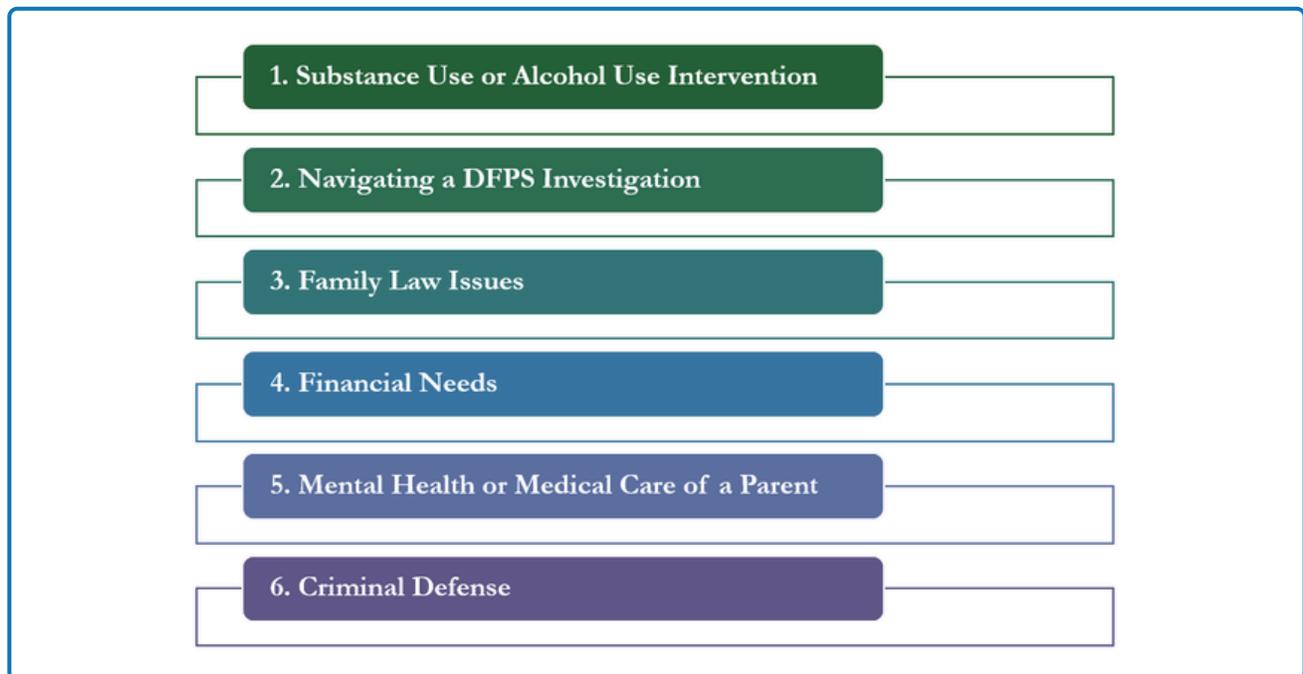


Respondents could also submit other opinions about how they would define pre-petition legal representation, and the following scenarios were submitted:

- *Advice in family law cases to prevent a DFPS investigation.*
- *Orders to aid investigation.*
- *Assistance is needed to allow quick access to protective orders and emergency pleadings to protect children from further abuse and neglect.*

# VI. Top Legal Issues

Respondents identified the most common legal needs for families that, if addressed early, could help avoid DFPS intervention. The top six ranked issues are below:



Family Law Issues include the following areas: divorce, paternity, custody, visitation, child support, Consent to Treatment of Child by a Nonparent (Tex. Fam. Code Ch. 32), Authorization Agreement for Nonparent Adult Caregiver (Tex. Fam. Code Ch. 34), and/or Temporary Authorization for Care of Minor Child (Tex. Fam. Code Ch. 35).

Financial Needs include the following: rent/utilities, SSI, SSD, TANF, WIC, SNAP, and Medicaid.

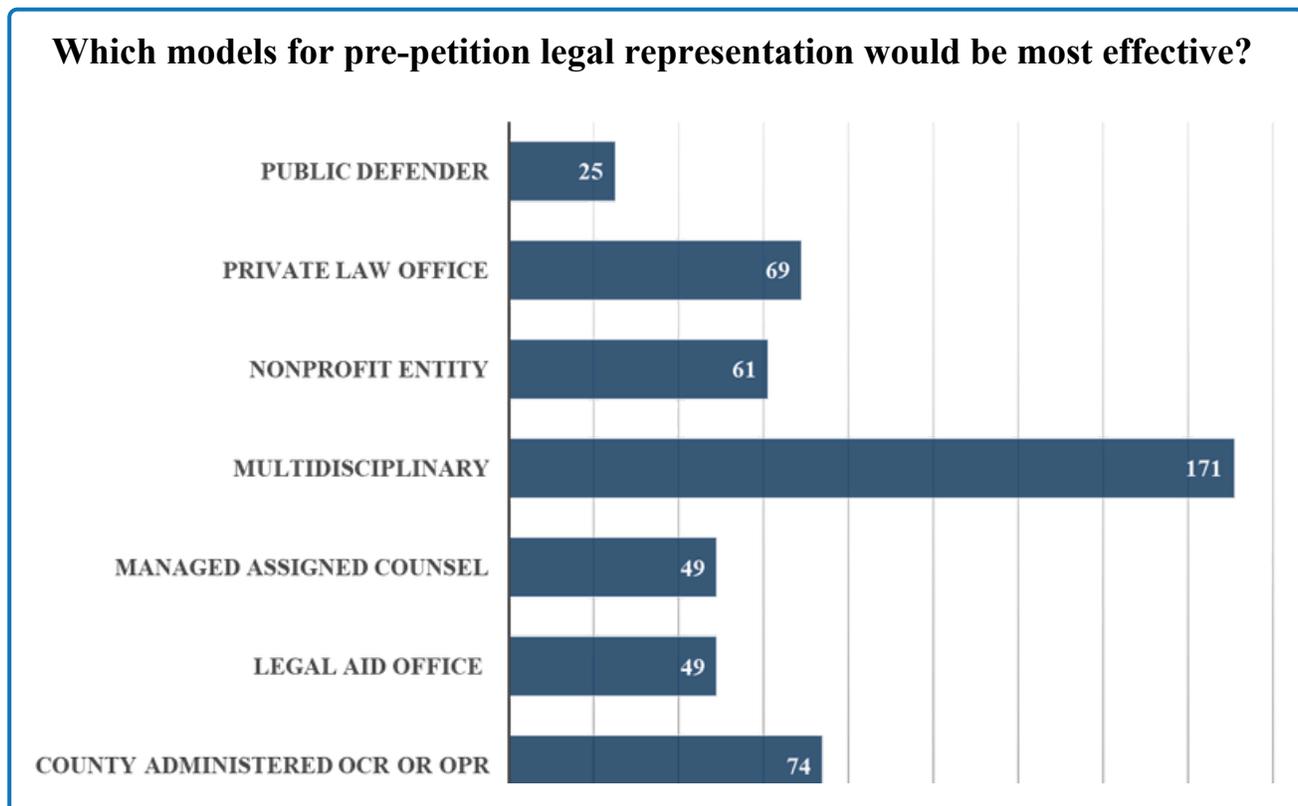
Criminal Defense also includes expunctions and driver’s license reinstatement.

Additional issues that were ranked are:

- Domestic violence and protective orders
- Child-related advocacy (i.e., school discipline, special education, juvenile justice)
- Documentation, including immigration or ID recovery

## VII. Effective Models

Respondents were asked for opinions about which models of pre-petition legal representation would be most effective to deliver pre-petition legal services and were able to select all that applied. Numbers of responses to this question are below:



Private Law Offices include solo practitioners or law firms.

Multidisciplinary offices include attorneys, social workers, and paralegals.

Managed Assigned Counsel systems are defined in Texas Family Code § 107.302.

County-administered Office of Child Representation (OCR) or Office of Parent Representation (OPR) are defined in Texas Family Code §§ 107.254-107.255.

Additional narrative responses included the following themes:

### **Establishing a Referral Source**

- *An effective model cannot rely on DFPS referrals. Legal entity needs to be able to screen in cases. Parents need to be informed of who[m] they can call for assistance.*

### **Need for Competent Counsel**

- *Any attorney with knowledge and experience with DFPS.*

### **Establishing Trust & the Attorney-Client Relationship**

- *The credibility of an independent attorney, having thoroughly explained attorney/client confidentiality, is one of the most powerful tools that I have seen help streamline an investigation and also encourage families to seek and accept help prior to a full removal.*

### **Need for Attorney Accountability**

- *Clear minimum efforts required and accountability of attorneys would be necessary to make a real difference.*

### **Attorney Billing & Funding Systems**

- *The "effectiveness" of any model is directly proportional to the pay rate of its appointed lawyers.*

### **Case Duration**

- *Pre-petition representation has a greater likelihood of being short lived and more abundant in number.*

### **Need for Trauma-Informed Staff**

- *Initial contact with any sort of CPS engagement is emotionally fraught. Social Workers in any pre-petition model should be trained in practical trauma-informed/mediation skills.*

### **Multidisciplinary Models**

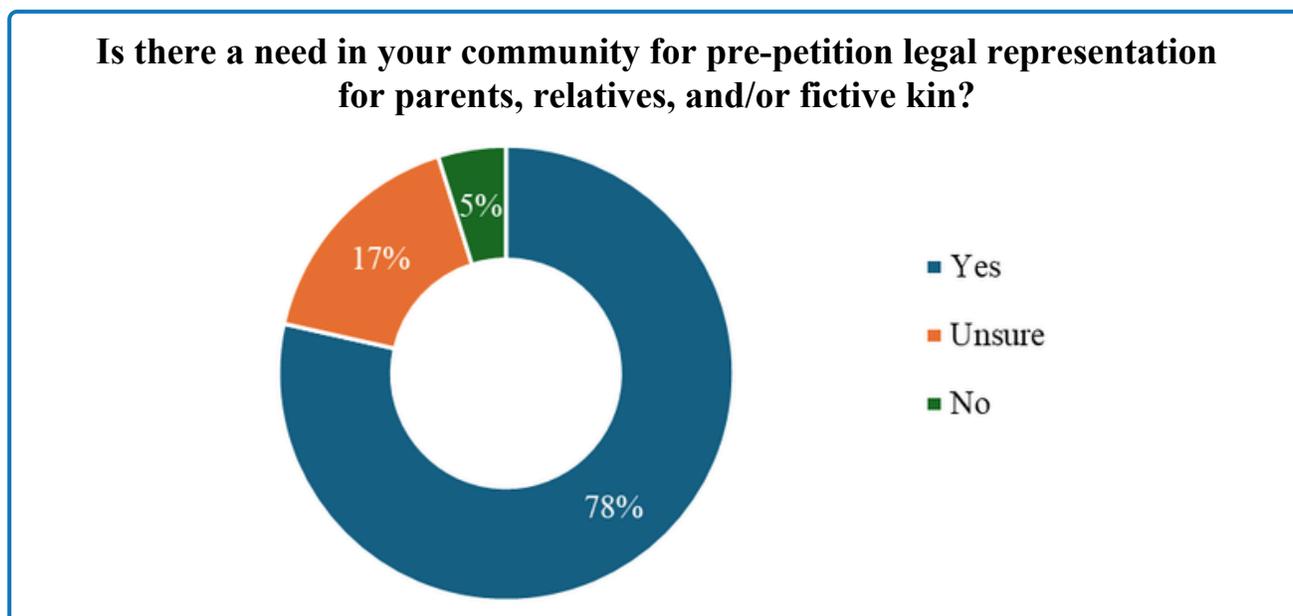
- *Social workers are invaluable to this system in navigating to resources.*

### **Capacity**

- *There are so few attorneys [who] do CPS cases in our town that all of them are on the court appointment list.*

# VIII. Identifying the Need

Respondents were asked for their opinions about whether there is a need in their community for pre-petition legal representation for parents, relatives, and/or fictive kin.<sup>1</sup> Over ¾ of responses indicated there is a need for this type of representation.



For those who answered yes, the following themes emerged when asked to describe the need:

## **Navigating a DFPS Investigation**

- *Child welfare is scary and intimidating for a lot of people. Parents and caregivers are afraid to ask questions that they desperately need answers to. Having someone guide them from the beginning would be very beneficial.*

## **Awareness of Rights**

- *Having representation, even if it was a Zoom or phone consultation to discuss their rights and alternatives, could be beneficial to avoid removal, saving the children trauma and the State money.*

<sup>1</sup> In the Child Protective Services Handbook, DFPS defines fictive kin as “Someone who is not related to a child under DFPS conservatorship, but who has, or who once had, a prior longstanding relationship with the child or the child’s sibling group. Teachers, coaches, family friends, godparents, and long-time neighbors are examples of people who may be fictive kin.”

## Assistance for Families

- *We have a large number of poverty-level and below families who have nowhere to turn for legal help or advice.*

## Prevention and Early Intervention

- *I have been appointed to several cases that could have been averted from entering the legal system had the parents and family had access to legal information, advice, and counsel on the investigation process.*

## Support for Relatives and Kin

- *I believe having pre-petition legal representation, especially for relatives, would prevent children from coming into foster care and give relative placements legal rights to act on behalf of the child.*

## Establishing Trust and Providing Accountability

- *Legal assistance at this stage, as well as FBSS, empowers families to make informed choices and holds DFPS accountable when there is no judicial oversight.*
- *Much of the distrust of DFPS by parents is successfully navigated when an attorney is involved and can assist the parent.*

## Legal Impact

- *Early legal intervention would not only protect due process but also reduce removals, strengthen relative placements, and shorten the time children spend in substitute care.*
- *Across [the] CBC Region, the need for pre-petition legal representation for parents, relatives, and fictive kin is both urgent and systemic. Families here face the combined challenges of geographic isolation, no public transportation, and a shortage of attorneys who are knowledgeable of child welfare. By the time DFPS files a petition, most parents have already made decisions without legal guidance—signing service plans, allowing voluntary placements, or agreeing to safety plans they don't fully understand.*

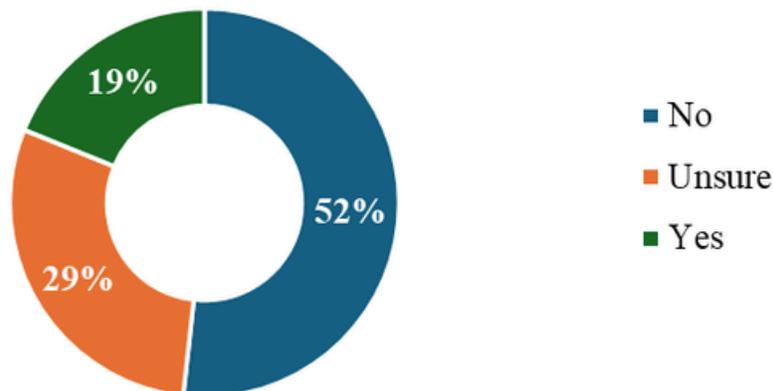
For those who indicated there was not a need for pre-petition legal representation in their community, the following themes emerged in the responses:

- *Legal representation is untimely (too early)*
- *Negative effect on the efficiency of a case*
- *Concerns with cost and capacity*
- *Families are already being served by DFPS*

## IX. Current Availability

Only 19% of respondents reported that any form of pre-petition legal representation is currently available in their communities.

### Is pre-petition legal representation available in your community?



If the response was yes, respondents were prompted to estimate the number of attorneys available for this type of representation. The responses ranged from 1 to 100, with many respondents unsure (29%) about how many attorneys are available for this work. The narrative responses are included below.

- *All attorneys who are on the wheel to take appointed cases involving parents and children in CPS cases.*
- *Many, but this population often cannot afford to hire.*
- *Most family lawyers.*
- *Not sure how many in total, but our office does [and we] are struggling to meet demand.*
- *None known, but in extreme circumstances, we will request parent representation or child representation, and the court will appoint.*
- *Very few.*

When asked if there is support for developing this type of representation in their community, the following responses were provided:

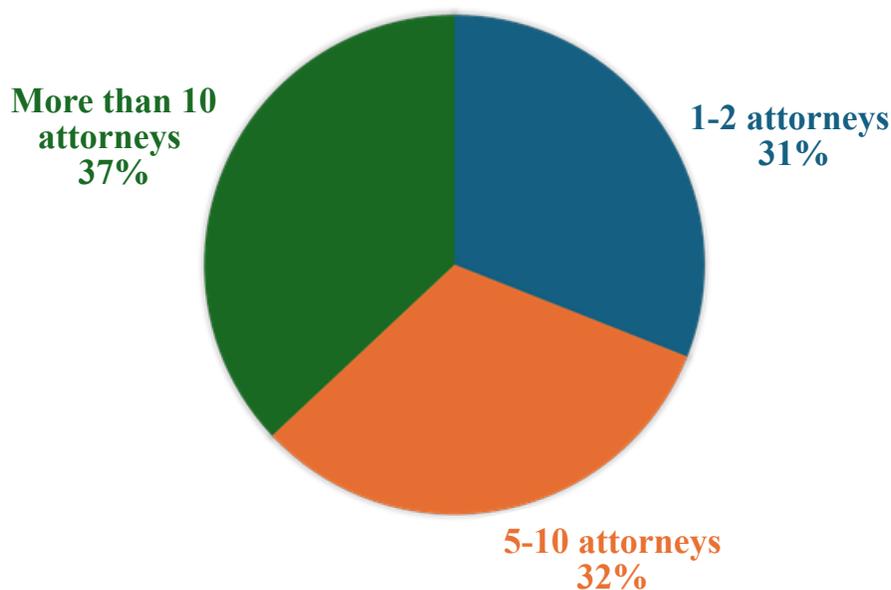
- **Yes**
  - *[There is] a strong judicial, district attorney, and attorney group that strongly advocate for children.*

- **Probably/Maybe**
  - *We don't have enough attorneys to do it. And the attorneys we have on the court-appointment list for child protective cases are about 4 attorneys who usually don't have time/or choose not to interact with their clients much.*
- **Probably not**
  - *I doubt there is much support if it means the counties will have to pay for it.*
- **Don't know/Unsure**
  - *Depends on funding.*
- **No**
  - *We don't have many attorneys willing to help.*
- **Other**
  - *I believe that most attorneys in this area of the law that I work with would agree that we need to become involved much earlier in the process, and this could avoid many children being removed from their homes.*
  - *[The] county does not prioritize representation in child welfare proceedings. The county does not pay attorneys the rate commensurate with other counties for court-appointed representation in both pre- and post-petition proceedings. The number of attorneys who are willing to be appointed has reduced dramatically in the last few years due to the lack of resources the county devotes to child welfare proceedings. In my view, having done this work for over 10 years, it is a great disservice to constituents and has actually led to the filing of cases that could be resolved without the need for court intervention.*

# X. Community Capacity

Responses were evenly distributed regarding whether local attorneys had the capacity to provide this type of work. When asked for opinions about how many attorneys in your primary practice area could provide pre-petition legal representation, about a third responded to each option.

**How many attorneys in your primary practice area could provide pre-petition legal representation?**



# XI. Concerns

The survey also sought to identify concerns with pre-petition legal representation. Of the 228 survey responses, 121 (53%) indicated they did not have concerns with this type of representation. Among the 107 respondents who indicated there was a concern, 27 indicated concerns regarding funding, and 23 respondents shared concerns with the availability of quality attorneys for the work.





## XII. Support

The final question in the survey elicited opinions about what the community would need in order to offer pre-petition legal representation. The most common needs identified were funding (25 responses) and training (8 responses). The following additional themes emerged from the responses:

### Statutory Change

- *Legislation mandating appointment of attorneys at the time an investigation is started. Policies requiring investigators and caseworkers not to contact parents until the parents are appointed counsel and counsel has reasonable notice of the date, time, and location of the contact. Reasonable notice meaning 24 hours, not 2 hours.*

### Structure & Framework

- *A structure for determining eligibility and a structure to connect attorneys to community members in need of the assistance.*

### Law Offices/Legal Entities

- *A dedicated program outside of CPS that is well-publicized and supported by both community and professionals.*

### Attorney Capacity

- *Our defense bar is so small already, we'd need more defense attorneys willing to do the work.*

### Data

- *Actual data about how this will reduce the number of children in foster care with dollar amounts.*

### Referrals

- *It would be very important that the families know that the participating attorney [does] NOT work for CPS.*
- *It would be nice if there was some sort of document/pamphlet that was left with parents whenever [the] investigator makes contact.*

### Training & Awareness

- *An awareness campaign, a centralized referral office, [and] participating professional development.*



## XIII. Conclusion

The prepetition legal representation survey provided key insights from a representative sample of legal and child welfare professionals throughout Texas. Respondents identified navigating DFPS investigations as the greatest need for pre-petition legal representation. Many survey respondents expressed strong support for developing such services. However, concerns related to cost, attorney capacity, and structural clarity must be addressed. Establishing funding, clear parameters for representation, and effective referral systems will be essential for broader implementation.

# Appendix – Additional Narrative Responses by Question

## In Your Opinion, Which Models for Pre-Petition Legal Representation Would be Most Effective?

- *Legal assistance helps parents navigate the complex system of law and policy when under investigation.*
- *During a CPI investigation, there is much stress for families that are involved. Having legal services to guide them as they navigate through the process, and to assist with understanding the importance of receiving the services that are being required. Many people have no idea what to do when CPS comes knocking at their door and their fear or preconceived notions about CPS often get in the way of effective outcomes in the investigation. If families knew what to do and knew not to be afraid, I think it is highly likely that many of them would cooperate and prevent removals.*
- *I don't believe it is necessary in every case, but there are times when people are so overwhelmed and confused (and panicked) by the investigation that they don't really understand the ramifications of what they agree to, or what they refuse to agree to.*
- *Information on how investigations work and parent's rights. Time to meet with legal counsel before interview or signing anything.*
- *Clear information about available resources and legal rights and duties.*
- *Many parents/relatives/fictive kin don't know their rights and duties (and any limitations thereof) under Texas law.*
- *Parents, relatives, and fictive kin do not know the system and do not even know the right questions to ask because they lack knowledge of the system, and they are afraid to ask for help for fear that it might be used against them to demonstrate that they cannot provide for the children.*
- *Allows for earlier interventions and recognition of families in crisis.*
- *Help parents get assistance with mental health and substance abuse issues in order to prevent removal.*
- *It would help for parents that are low IDD.*
- *We have limited resources in our community for families with significant barriers to accessing them. Parents and children risk engaging with law enforcement and CPS when struggling to survive and address basic physical and mental health needs.*
- *It would assist in locating potential placement if a parent is unable/unwilling to make changes necessary to keep the child in the home.*
- *For parents, relatives, and fictive kin who cannot afford high-quality legal representation, there is absolutely a need for competent, affordable resources who can provide sound advice and guidance.*
- *This entire system is a slippery slope that starts as soon as [the investigator] shows up. With good representation, it's been shown that children are far less likely to be removed.*
- *Allow families to handle issues privately without CPS intervention. Get families connected to resources without legal intervention.*

- *The county is overwhelmed with court cases. Anything to keep children safe and in their home would be valuable.*
- *Assistance with modification actions to avoid a removal or assisting relatives and fictive kin placements in seeking orders to avoid a removal.*
- *Early intervention with domestic violence and drug issues for parents. Also, support systems and resource provision for parents, relatives, and/or fictive kin to help children have family stability during the intervention.*
- *Parents and relatives need help to create lasting orders that help family members without intervention by the state.*
- *People who are raising kids need assistance getting the proper legal documentation they need to fully care for the child (ex, medical, school, etc.).*
- *It would be great to get a program started to help relatives who are able to care for children long-term, especially in cases where the parents have gone and are unlikely to come back to help plan for or participate in the child's needs.*
- *There appear to be too many children in too many informal family placements where their medical, education, and mental health needs are not able to be met adequately because legal documentation is not in place to assist the caregivers in the support of the children.*
- *I think relatives need orders for custody and protection of children, and if this were available without CPS involvement, you could cut down CPS cases. Also, same idea for protective orders. The problem is that relatives do not usually have standing to do such a thing.*
- *Fairness in navigating the investigations.*
- *Lots of families ask questions that CPS or CPS's attorney cannot answer; we provide info for the friend of court, Texas legal help, or local legal aid, but the assistance of an attorney would be most helpful to them.*
- *Parents and relatives have stated that they feel forced into a family-based plan without being allowed to seek advice--feel like they agree and sign, or I will remove your children.*
- *Parents don't get representation until a case is filed. That's entirely too late in the game.*
- *Even my BEST caseworkers have a hard time explaining alternative response and encouraging participation in alternative response/FBSS due to the fact [that] they're just "on the other side." When I have the chance as an attorney and can explain my independence from the agency, I can cover a lot more ground with families regarding participation and understanding of the process.*
- *Once the family has come to the attention of the Department, it would be beneficial for the family to be able to reach out to someone who wasn't "against them" to help [them] navigate their rights.*
- *An unintended consequence of CBC is higher turnover; this may help support some cases from falling through the cracks because there is an entity that can help the family understand what's taking place in the event a newly assigned worker is coming onboard.*
- *Our region is not privatized, and so our caseworkers have no experience and NO TRAINING other than "shadowing" when they become case assignable. The families we work with are not well informed about the process of being at the mercy of CPS, and many times do not take it seriously enough to provide the information that has become necessary to either shorten or completely avoid an open case.*
- *Currently, the only people who receive pre-petition representation are the people who can retain an attorney.*

- *These early, uninformed steps often determine the trajectory of the case. Parents sign away rights or fail to comply with safety agreements not out of defiance, but out of confusion and fear. Relatives and fictive kin who could have stepped in are frequently unaware of their eligibility or discouraged by the complexity of background checks and paperwork. Without pre-petition legal advice, valuable placement options are lost, and children enter foster care unnecessarily.*
- *In these rural counties, the SSCC operates with reduced, untrained staff and wide coverage areas. The system simply does not have built-in capacity to educate or advocate for families before removal occurs. Pre-petition representation could fill that gap—offering early consultation, explaining service expectations, ensuring parents are heard in Family Team Meetings and in FGDM [Family Group Decision Making], and helping relatives complete placement requirements before the Department defaults to foster care.*
- *Due to misconceptions, families do not participate/cooperate in pre-petition cases. By the time a court ordered services case or removal occurs, if an attorney could/would have spent time explaining how/what/why and the consequences of [the] same, the removals/COS cases would be less. Parents need guidance and support from attorneys (or even CASA?) - the earlier involvement, the better.*
- *If there were pre-petition legal representation, there may be an ability for a family to construct a sustainable and legal conservatorship plan with teeth and accountability.*
- *The biggest need I see in pre-petition practice is the costs of litigation—even with filing costs waived and pro bono legal services, the greatest expenses are service and amicus/ad litem fees. These costs are easily in the thousands for cases, and courts have no resources to offer help or are simply unsympathetic.*

For those who indicated there was not a need for pre-petition legal representation in their community, the following explanations accompanied the responses:

- *I do not believe legal advocacy is needed if legal proceedings have not been initiated. It is premature in my opinion.*
- *Adding attorney representation in Court-Ordered Services cases has only proven to make the process unnecessarily difficult and actually unproductive. I can only imagine what would happen with pre-petition representation!*
- *Already assigned to contract attorneys.*
- *Because they put children at risk by delaying investigations.*
- *Cost.*
- *Families, fictive kin, etc., will effectively have a free attorney, when many people dealing with family situations have to hire attorneys. It will also create a lot of SAPCR cases, as many attorneys appointed for non-parents will want SAPCR or MFEs filed.*
- *FBSS is already in place and seems to do the same job.*
- *For the most part, we have very good relationships with our community partners, and CPS does a very good job (mostly) explaining to parents.*
- *It is difficult to represent a party when there is no litigation going on. Attorneys can't speculate on what the department may or may not file.*
- *[There are] not enough attorneys to represent people at legal, much less pre-petition, at least in our area.*
- *The logistics would be a mess, and the department would not be able to work with the family because their lawyer would just tell them not to talk to CPS at all.*

## Is Pre-Petition Legal Representation Available in Your Community?

### Yes Answers:

- *The court-appointment wheel works very well for FBSS and TFF cases. It could easily be expanded for pre-petition representation.*
- *There are attorneys who would be interested.*
- *The funds are not available.*

### Probably/Maybe Answers:

- *There are currently court-appointed attorneys when we have a court-ordered services case, so it makes sense to extend that representation to FBSS cases as well.*

### Probably Not Answers:

- *It would need to be elevated.*
- *Unless courts are willing to appoint and pay for the attorneys.*
- *If there is a cost to the county.*
- *Legal aid programs and public defenders are already strained to [the] limit.*
- *I would have to see how it would work and under what circumstances. I think there are very few cases that it would actually help with.*

### Don't Know/Unsure Answers:

- *Right now, it's just a matter of parents/families knowing and having access to private legal representation.*
- *Most family law attorneys are unaware of the mechanics of a CPS investigation.*
- *If there would be sufficient attorneys who could timely provide counsel to parties in accordance with the time frame of the department.*

### Other Responses:

- *Attorneys know it is needed, county does not want to pay.*
- *It's hard to guess. I think the greater community is ignorant about the necessity for this type of representation. Even among attorneys who represent parents & children in COS [Court-Ordered Services] & TMC [Temporary Managing Conservatorship] cases, there seems to be considerable ignorance about what happens during INV [Investigations] & FBSS phases. If they could see the difference in what a county would pay in legal representation alone, contrasting pre-petition representation cases with TMC cases, I'd think every county would be in favor of establishing these programs for pre-petition representation.*
- *Not if it comes without funding. Taxpayers are more interested in county funds being spent on drainage and road repair than on indigent children's issues.*
- *People are at least open to discussing it and seem to recognize the need for it.*
- *We used to have uncontested SAPCR litigation funded for the non-parent managing conservators to get agreed orders completed, but after COVID, either the funding and/or the CPS referral infrastructure and process has diminished.*

## Concerns with Pre-Petition Legal Representation

- *There is no one to ask for help unless you have a lot of money.*
- *Not sure it's an effective use of resources. FBSS seems to do the exact same thing.*

- *My concerns are with funding and quality assurance of the ... skills of attorneys providing pre-petition representation.*
- *How would the referrals be done for the families to take advantage of this service?*
- *There is none, and parents are getting railroaded.*

## **What Would Your Community Need to Provide Pre-Petition Legal Representation?**

- *Better laws to give us guidance on when this is available and how it works for the parents and the children.*
- *Appointment for an attorney during investigation.*
- *Legal authority and scheme to assign an attorney for this limited purpose.*
- *Court appointing (or agreeing to pay) for attorneys on the wheel to parents involved in the investigation stage, where CPS is considering filing a petition for services, and if time and circumstance permit, a petition for TMC. This would likely require statutory (or other legal authority) and buy-in from the County that appointing counsel during the investigation stage can be a cost savings in the aggregate.*
- *A clear understanding of everyone's duties.*
- *Clear boundaries, clear leadership, and attorneys willing to provide this assistance.*
- *We would need some structure and guidelines. Are we talking about representation purely during investigations and/or FBSS that has NOT been court-ordered? If so, how would we become involved? Who would we be representing - the parents, the child, the family as a whole? Would we continue on the case if it became a removal case, or would new and separate attorneys be appointed? (It seems to me that a single attorney could often represent the family in dealing with CPS in the investigation stage, but would then be precluded from representation in a removal case.*
- *Guidelines of what is within the scope of representation.*
- *Further study is needed. The best arrangement might be for the same attorney to continue representation if a lawsuit is filed. I am also not sure indigent persons would seek pre-petition representation, even if it was available at no cost.*
- *Systematic approach, mentors, oversight body.*
- *A few attys to be like a team, plus someone to look out for the kid's best interest.*
- *A non-profit/legal aid organization that spearheads the project.*
- *An office dedicated to it in a legal aid model or agreement with an already open practice to provide representation. Our county does the contract for attorneys to handle CPS, and they already have way too many cases.*
- *A designated office—it could be public defender, legal aid, or office of parental representation—whatever is already established in that region.*
- *Access to either a nonprofit entity that could assist or access to a paid government position specifically designated for pre-petition assistance.*
- *Skilled attorneys and social workers also assigned to the cases along with the attorneys.*
- *A wider variety of lawyers who can represent indigent clients.*
- *Attorneys that would be willing to be a party to pre-legal representation. Parents that would be willing to participate.*
- *Attorneys willing to fill the role.*
- *Access to 3rd year law students or students waiting for test [bar exam] results to help. Access to financial resources to pay licensed attorneys to help.*
- *Consults prior to answering DFPS questions.*

- *Education, collaboration.*
- *Guidance.*
- *Better information available to the public.*
- *Outreach on defining and acknowledging the need (including cost-benefit analysis to the county/community). Buy-in from the community on the need. Funding source and providers.*
- *Participating courts.*
- *Approval by the County Commissioners Court.*
- *Lower financial barriers to access the legal system (e.g., service fees, DNA test fees, amicus fees, etc.).*
- *State-funded position.*
- *It is my belief that pre-petition legal representation would be premature, and legal assistance is only warranted after legal proceedings have been filed.*
- *More grants to support parents (and designated caregivers) with court costs. Better referral networks for parents under DFPS investigation.*
- *More social workers with training attached to or working in conjunction with lawyers.*
- *The hotline and a list of attorneys to call.*
- *Dedicated access to community programs.*
- *A separate wheel for pre-petition work.*