



Texas Department of Family and Protective Services

FOR MORE INFORMATION
Marissa Gonzales 817-312-4144

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
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DFPS Announces Appointments to New Child Protective Investigations Advisory Committee

Austin, Texas – The Texas Department of Family and Protective Services (DFPS) today announced the appointment of nine members to the newly established Child Protective Investigations (CPI) Advisory Committee, marking a significant step forward in strengthening the accuracy, consistency, and transparency of child protective investigations across Texas.

The advisory committee was created in accordance with House Bill 140 (89th Regular Session), which directs the DFPS Commissioner to convene a group of experts and individuals with lived experience to advise the department on improving investigative practices, policies, and training within Child Protective Investigations.

“Protecting children while ensuring accuracy, consistency, and due process in our investigations is fundamental to our mission,” said DFPS Commissioner Audrey O’Neill. “This advisory committee brings together professionals and individuals with firsthand knowledge of the child protection system, and their guidance will be critical as we continue to strengthen investigations across the state.”

The committee’s purpose is to provide recommendations to DFPS on:

- Increasing the accuracy and consistency of abuse and neglect investigations
- Standardizing investigative policies and procedures statewide
- Ensuring due process protections for children and families
- Strengthening training and professional development for investigators
- Improving communication with courts, attorneys, and legal advocates
- Incorporating data-informed approaches and public input into investigations

Following a statewide solicitation that generated 138 applications, DFPS conducted a thorough review and interview process, in consultation with legislative leadership, to identify members who reflect a wide range of expertise and perspectives.

The following individuals have been appointed by the DFPS Commissioner to serve on the CPI Advisory Committee, effective January 14, 2026:

- Natalie Reeves, Interim Associate Commissioner for Child Protective Investigations, DFPS
- Jarita Wharton, CPI Regional Director, DFPS
- Cleveland Jackson, CPI Supervisor (Urban Region), DFPS
- Stephanie Loewe, CPI Caseworker (Rural Region), DFPS
- Carissa Cooks, Parent/Caregiver with experience in a child protective services case
- Matt Waller, Parent/Caregiver with experience in a child protective services case
- Daphny Milligan, Parent/Caregiver with experience in a child protective services case
- Chris Branson, Attorney representing caregivers in child protective legal cases
- Megan Barcak, County District Attorney

Governor Greg Abbott has appointed and named District Judge Ryan D. Larson chair and appointed District Judge Terence Davis to the committee. Additional public members will be appointed by the Lieutenant Governor, and Speaker of the House, as required by statute, to complete the full advisory committee.

Members will serve two-year terms and participate in quarterly public meetings. The committee plans to hold its first meeting in March 2026.

For more information about DFPS and the Child Protective Investigations Advisory Committee, visit www.dfps.texas.gov.