



*Tarrant County: Our North Texas Home*



*Tarrant County Judge  
B. Glen Whitley*

## TARRANT COUNTY PAYS THE BILL FOR STATE PRISONERS IN THE COUNTY JAIL

Tarrant County's taxpayers spend millions of dollars every year housing state prisoners in the county jail.

Like a cousin from out of town sleeping on the living room sofa, a few nights might be alright, but there should be a limit on how much county tax-

payers have to dig into their pockets to pay for prisoners that really are the responsibility of the State of Texas.

There are about 3,400 prisoners in the county jail, on average. It costs about \$82 a day for each prisoner - room, board and minor medical care - to keep them locked up.

That's about \$102 million a year for all the prisoners.

About 2,000 prisoners are either awaiting trial or sentencing. They generally spend about three months in jail. That's about \$60 million a year. A case may be made that the county should pick up some of the expense of those prisoners since many of their trials are in state district courts in Tarrant County.

Those prisoners who have been sentenced and are waiting to go to prison, about 143 each day, cost Tarrant County taxpayers about \$4.3 million a year.

Typically, it takes the state about three-weeks to get its inmates from the Tarrant County jail.

That's too long and it costs the county's taxpayers too

much. The state should pick up its prisoners when they are ready to go. County taxpayers should be reimbursed for every day a state prisoner is held in jail.

There are also parole violators heading back to state prison and some who have short sentences who don't go to prison at all, but serve their time in a county jail. We cover the cost of keeping them in jail, too.

That's the way it is. If a Texas county has custody of a state inmate, the county's residents pay all the expenses. But that's not the way it should be.

Across the nation, counties are housing more state prisoners without receiving adequate compensation from their respective states.

Some states pay counties a few dollars to cover the cost of prisoner meals, while other states pay counties for room, board and routine medical care.

It is an economic burden and an unfunded mandate from the state imposed on county taxpayers and that makes it more difficult to deliver some of the county services that you and I may take for granted.

Too often, many lawmakers in Austin assume that counties will get the job done, even if funds are not provided to carry out the state's responsibilities.

Sure the state budget is tight. It always is. Every public entity's budget is tight, or at least it should be. But the state should reimburse counties for spending millions of dollars each year to house state prisoners.

# SENIOR SYNERGY EXPO

**A Health and Lifestyle Expo  
for Boomers, Seniors and Caregivers**

*Free Admission, Health Screenings, Workshops, Parking and Lunch*

To Attend: Register at [www.seniorsynergyexpo.com](http://www.seniorsynergyexpo.com) or [klrotter@tarrantcounty.com](mailto:klrotter@tarrantcounty.com) ~ 817-884-1234

**Thursday, May 4, 2017**

**8:30 a.m.—2:00 p.m.**

**Will Rogers - Amon G. Carter Jr.**

**Exhibits Halls**

**3400 Burnett-Tandy Drive**

**Fort Worth, TX 76107**

**GUARDING AGAINST ABUSE AND NEGLECT**

## Legislative Reform of Child Protective Services

The bleak story of abused and neglected children in Texas may have a happier ending this year if the State Legislature can overhaul the agency responsible for child welfare and enact long-needed reforms.

Care for the most vulnerable children in Texas has been managed, some say mismanaged, by Child Protective Services, a part of the larger Department of Family Protective Services, which itself is under the umbrella of the state's Health and Human Services system.

For more than a few years, there have been reports of child-abuse deaths and injuries, a seeming inability to rapidly help abused children and a shortage of caseworkers coupled with a high staff turnover rate.

In 2015, a federal judge ordered the state to hire more caseworkers and to reduce caseloads after the court determined that Child Protective Services was failing at its job.

Governor Greg Abbott made fixing the agency a priority of the 85th Texas Legislature. The state gave the agency \$150 million in emergency funds to increase caseworker pay and retention in December.

Tarrant County does its part for child welfare through the Tarrant County Child Protective Services Board and by paying for about 40 of the more than 400 child protective services workers who serve children in the county.

The county has, for many years, paid for about 10 percent of the caseworkers who care for the abused and neglected children, said Bruce Capehart, chair of the Child Protective Services Board.

The board, in addition to overseeing the caseworkers' contract with the state, helps provide transportation and clothing for children and some assistance to relatives in an effort to keep the children within their original families.

In the Legislature, both the Texas Senate and the House have passed reform bills.

The Senate bill calls for the placement of children nearer to their original home and for foster children to be screened and treated for health problems quickly. It also calls for a plan to increase the number of foster homes and to focus services in areas of the state where there is the greatest risk of abused or neglected children.



The House bill proposes to increase payments to relatives of abused children in an effort to keep children with family members and out of foster homes.

The bill would make both agencies independent of the State Health Commission, reporting to the governor.

A proposal to privatize some of the child welfare responsibilities has met with some opposition over concern that it might lead to fewer state caseworkers and should the non-profits fail, leave children without any responsible party watching over them.

Nevertheless, a two-year pilot program in Tarrant County and six adjacent counties, called Foster Care Redesign, a partnership of the nonprofit ACH Child and Family Services and the state agency, has drawn praise for its ability to implement reforms.

Foster Care Redesign is a new way to provide foster care services that uses a single regional contractor, who is responsible for finding foster homes or other living arrangements for children and providing them with services.

The Texas Senate and the House now must craft one bill, but it is not clear how much it will be modeled after the successful Tarrant County pilot program.

### Severe Weather Awareness at KnoWhat2Do

Springtime ushers in the best and worst of weather in North Texas. Along with mild temperatures, Tarrant County gets storms that can bring floods, hail, lightning or tornadoes.

The [www.KnoWhat2Do.com](http://www.KnoWhat2Do.com) website is an online information center with hazardous weather safety tips so people can participate in their own safety and help those around them.

The **KnoWhat2Do** disaster preparedness program can help you put together a family severe weather response plan. Emergency shelter information is provided, as well as checklists for emergency kits and equipment.

Each Tarrant County community has its own severe weather warning system. Local emergency management offices have details on the warnings used in your community.

The **KnoWhat2Do** website provides lifesaving measures that can be followed in a severe weather crisis. For example, it recommends buying weather radios to provide alerts.

By checking out [www.KnoWhat2Do.com](http://www.KnoWhat2Do.com), Tarrant County residents can find solutions that work for their own circumstances and locations.

### Online Tools To Keep Up With The 85th Texas Legislature

Texas Legislature Online

<http://www.capitol.state.tx.us/>

Legislative Reference Library

[www.lrl.state.tx.us/](http://www.lrl.state.tx.us/)

<https://legiscan.com/TX>