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Remarks to the 17th Annual Conference on the Prevention of Child Abuse
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Here we're talking about child abuse prevention but back in Austin, specifically at the state capitol, the talk is all about money, or the lack thereof.

Whether it's schools, children's health care, transportation, foster care, or child abuse prevention, everything is being viewed through the prism of the state budget. And the colors coming through this time around are not very bright and vibrant.

For the first time in recent memory, the leadership and lawmakers are doing what's called zero-based budgeting. Basically, every state agency is having to go in and make a pitch for the money they want for the next biennium. Is that program necessary? Does it serve a worthy need? Every agency is having to justify its request for state dollars. In a way, it's a healthy exercise that will force government to live within its means. But it's also kind of scary because we know how much need is out there for prevention services and the demand for our services is not dropping along with the amount of money available.

But let's spend a few minutes taking a look at the progress we've made during the last few years. In 1995, my agency, TDPRS, had one prevention program, STAR. It was funded at \$4 million per year and it served _____. In 2002, Prevention and Early Intervention was a cornerstone division of PRS with 16 programs and a division budget of _____. Prevention and early intervention have become an increasingly important portion of the array of services we offer and the rapid growth in both programs and resources have reflected that. But when you look at that growth, it's not just about money. The philosophy regarding prevention and early intervention programs has evolved as well. Leaders in the legislative process have taken that old adage to heart: "An ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure." Those who take a long-term view of things recognize that prevention and early intervention programs are not only people-effective, they're cost effective as well.

Every day on the CPS side of our agency we see the horrors of child abuse and neglect - actions that knock a child off course, injuries that can scar a child physically, mentally, or emotionally for life. It's hard to put a dollar figure on the loss of human potential when a child is abused or neglected, but the lost potential is real. Something that's easier to put your hands around is the cost of the process that rescues a child from an abusive or neglectful situation. That process requires caseworkers, support staff, supervisors, attorneys, medical expenses, counseling expenses, foster care reimbursement, services for parents, court costs. All these things cost money. Isn't it more cost-effective to put in place programs that help prevent child abuse from happening in the first place?

As part of that effort, I'm pleased to tell you that we have just finished work on this year's Child Abuse Prevention Kit and they should be ready for distribution for Child Abuse Awareness Month in April. The kits feature publicity tools and templates, articles

about prevention of child abuse, web site links, and activities to help spread the message, Child Abuse Prevention: It's Up to You.

There's no question about it, we're entering a time that will increase the challenges we face in our efforts to curb child abuse in Texas. But it's important to keep focused on our mission and the children who depend on us, not get bogged down in the day-to-day debates happening at the Capitol. In the current environment we need to focus on outcomes, show impact, prove that the program is worth the money being spent on it, and continue our work saving lives and changing lives for the better.