



Legal Services Committee  
April 17, 2025

Amy Smith	HCDVCC
Thomas Velez	Texas Advocacy Project
Alexia Rauen	Advocates for Immigrant Survivors
Denetra Elder	Access Harris/County Health Dept.
Meagen Belovsky	South Texas College of Law
Mercedes Santillanes	Pasadena Police Dept.

Amy Smith opened the meeting and welcomed everyone. Introductions were made.

Alexia Rauen talked about a new Federal registry for immigrants that went into effect on Friday April 11<sup>th</sup>. This registry is for anyone in the Country that has not registered through any other means. She also talked about mass layoffs at local non-profits that are working with immigrants. Several non-profits have reported 20% layoffs or closing all together. All the Federal funding for refugee services is gone but there is still an injunction in place to keep funding for children's services. Some agencies are thinking about moving to low fees to generate revenue to stay open. Their clients are telling them they are terrified and afraid to report anything to the police. She is especially concerned about child sexual assault victims because of this fear as well as DV victims.

Meagen Belovsky gave an update on the Pro-Se Video Project with the 280<sup>th</sup> District Court. They are scheduled to film the video on April 30<sup>th</sup> at South Texas. They will be covering 9 sections that will include the best way to get the information about common objections, how to get in evidence like text messages and phone calls, videos and hearsay from children. They are aiming for about a 20-minute video with just basic information in video form.

Amy mentioned that the DOJ pulled all the funding for the American Bar Association's trainings for the rest of the year and there is concern that the Executive Orders cutting funding to several big law firms will impact funding and pro bono work in the legal aid field.

Thomas mentioned that TAP recently had training on T and U Visas since they are getting a lot of calls about what will happen if a victim does not report or cooperate because of their fear of

deportation. He also talked about how they are having to step up their safety protocols for coded calls and text messages because their clients are living in dangerous situations.

Amy mentioned a few bills to be watching:

There was some concern about HB 2771 which would reduce the number of crimes that would prevent someone convicted of a crime to possess a gun. These are the offenses that would be excluded in HB 2771 1. Sec. 42.072. STALKING. 2. Sec. 25.02. PROHIBITED SEXUAL CONDUCT. 3. Sec. 25.031. AGREEMENT TO ABDUCT FROM CUSTODY. 4. Sec. 25.07. VIOLATION OF CERTAIN COURT ORDERS OR CONDITIONS OF BOND IN A FAMILY VIOLENCE, CHILD ABUSE OR NEGLECT, SEXUAL ASSAULT OR ABUSE, INDECENT ASSAULT, STALKING, OR TRAFFICKING CASE. 5. Sec. 25.08. SALE OR PURCHASE OF CHILD. 6. Sec. 25.10. INTERFERENCE WITH RIGHTS OF GUARDIAN OF THE PERSON. 7. Sec. 25.11. CONTINUOUS VIOLENCE AGAINST THE FAMILY. Here is a link to the written testimony provided:

<https://capitol.texas.gov/tlodocs/89R/publiccomments/billhistory/HB02771H.pdf#navpanes=0>

This bill was left pending in committee.

HB 2496 which would have required a dv incident to have occurred 2 years prior to filing for a Protective Order. (TAP testified against this bill using one of Thomas's cases as an example). This bill did not get voted out of the committee.

Amy mentioned several agencies were approached by the Governor's Office about support for Bail Reform. No bill number was provided, and it appears the Governor's Office might be gearing up for a social media campaign since Bail Reform is one of his priorities this session. Mercedes mentioned that April Aguirre, whose niece was killed has several videos on her website that might be helpful. Amy also mentioned SB9 which includes mention of Bail Reform, and the role of Magistrates had a hearing and was favorably voted out of committee. There was also some discussion about several bail bills that have been filed some good, some bad and some that appear good in their summaries but have some hidden dangers for victims that are buried in the text of the bill.

Amy announced the May meeting will be cancelled since she will be out of town.

Meeting adjourned.

Next meeting Thursday June 19<sup>th</sup> at 11:30 via ZOOM.