



Support HB 4113: Ensure Continued Access to TJJD Aggregate Data

Good policy starts with open and accurate data

Texans rely on data in order to understand how pervasive an issue is and to help identify solutions to those issues. Aggregate data – data that does not contain any identifying information – is imperative in assessing the state of the juvenile justice system in Texas. Regular and frequent access to aggregate data ensures that we have the fewest possible barriers in order to monitor the treatment of youth in the juvenile justice system.

THE TEXAS JUVENILE JUSTICE DEPARTMENT STOPPED RELEASING AGGREGATE DATA THEY PREVIOUSLY PROVIDED



Over the last few years, the Texas Juvenile Justice Department (TJJD) has withheld aggregate data about youth in the juvenile justice system. Due to changes in the Texas Family Code in 2017, TJJD now interprets the statute as expanding the definition of what is considered confidential to include aggregate information. Aggregate data does not contain information that identifies youth; therefore, it has typically not been considered confidential. In fact, TJJD regularly releases some aggregate information in their State of Juvenile Probation Activity in Texas reports.¹ However, the reports do not cover all aggregate data that is available (for example, the total number of 10-12 year olds that are referred due to school-based behaviors) and are specific only to a given calendar year.

In addition, aggregate data that was previously released includes data that is reported to TJJD by county probation departments. This means that in order to understand trends in probation departments, a requestor would have to individually request information from all 254 counties in Texas thereby introducing the possibility of inconsistent data production between counties, adding additional expenses, and increasing the length of time it would take to identify problems and trends.

HB 4113 WOULD PROTECT CONFIDENTIAL YOUTH INFORMATION WHILE ALSO ALLOWING AGGREGATE, NON-CONFIDENTIAL INFORMATION TO BE RELEASED.

It is vital to have access to aggregate data in order to determine statewide trends for youth in the juvenile justice system and to ensure good outcomes for those youth. HB 4113 seeks to clarify the statute so that confidential youth information can continue to be confidential, but allow TJJD to release important aggregate information that does not identify youth.



HB 4113 does this by:

- ✓ **Updating the Texas Family Code to clarify that aggregate data is not confidential; and**
- ✓ **Define identifiable information that can only be released to researchers through a negotiated research agreement with the Texas Juvenile Justice Department.**

¹ See Texas Juvenile Justice Department, *The State of Juvenile Probation Activity in Texas 2019* (2019), available at: <https://www.tjjd.texas.gov/index.php/component/jdownloads/send/334-state-of-juvenile-probation-activity/2479-the-state-of-juvenile-probation-activity-in-texas-2019>