

**TEXAS EMERGENCY NETWORK DIVERSION (TEND) COURT:
WEBB COUNTY and the 4th ADMINISTRATIVE JUDICIAL REGIONⁱ**

GRANT SUBMISSION to:

**Office of the Governor, Public Safety Office Funding Announcement:
County Innovations to Address Commercial Sexual Exploitation**
FY2026 County Solutions to Address Commercial Sexual Exploitation Announcement

Innovative Programs (CSEP): Innovative programs that address commercial sexual exploitation but do not fit neatly into the other eligible activities. This may include a combination of approaches such as addressing risk and protective factors for victimization or perpetration; prevention education; civil enforcement; outreach and service provision to high-risk populations; and other efforts to disrupt the market for commercial sex.

BY:

**Judge Tano Tijerina
Webb County Administrative Judge
&
Judge Selina L. Mireles
Child Protection Court, 4th and 5th Administrative Judicial Regions
Laredo/Webb County Justice Center**

**Start date: October 1, 2025
End date: September 30, 2026**

Amount requested: \$325,000

FILED Feb. 11th 20 25 @ 10:00 a.m.
MARGIE RAMIREZ IBARRA
COUNTY CLERK, WEBB COUNTY, TEXAS
BY [Signature] DEPUTY

Abstract:

The proposed grant is for a Texas Emergency Network Diversion (TEND) Court program in Laredo/Webb County to identify and provide services to youth aged 10 through 22 and, who are at risk of sexual exploitation in the 4th Administrative Judicial Regions Child Protection Court of Judge Selina L. Mireles. Overseen by an Executive Director, the TEND Court program has received four years of funding; its first year was funded in 2021-2022 and the program has been refunded three times (2022-2025). This proposed grant is seeking to renew and expand this innovative court program for another year (2025-2026). Judge Mireles and the Executive Director of TEND Court will collaborate with relevant child protective services and counseling providers in Laredo/Webb County. TEND Court will also network with other relevant legal and community resource individuals and groups who are working to abate child sexual exploitation. Using the CSE-IT tool, TEND Court will identify at-risk youth, victims and potential victims of exploitation, human trafficking, and commercial sex trafficking and provide prevention and healing trauma-informed care services. The program follows a youth empowerment approach in assisting youth set goals. TEND Court fills community foster care gaps in order to identify, protect, and prevent exploitation, human trafficking, and child sexual exploitation (CSE) with trauma-informed services so as to provide justice for exploited, human trafficked, and commercially sexually trafficked victims in Laredo/ Webb County.

Introduction

Human sex trafficking is a problem that exists in South Texas but there **had been no** coordinated programs and services for victims in Laredo, Webb County, Texas until the Texas Emergency Network Diversion Court program was funded in October 2021. The Texas Emergency Network Diversion Court program operates out of Judge Selina Mireles' Child Protection Court (4th and 5th Administrative Judicial Region) and provides identification and services to address the needs of children at risk of commercial exploitation, sex exploitation, and abuse. TEND Court adheres to the Texas State Governor Office's strategy to extend identification and advocacy services to victims of sex trafficking. TEND Court will not replace existing statewide efforts; we aim to enhance and extend identification and protection efforts to South Texas. This grant proposal seeks to fund the TEND Court for another year of operation.

In the United States, it is estimated that there are over 244,000 children at risk of sexual exploitation.¹ The University of Texas at Austin reported that about 79,000 children are sex trafficked in Texas.² In 2023, the Texas human trafficking hotline received 2,373 "signals" and identified 583 victims or survivors of human trafficking; the majority of these contacts were for sex trafficking victimization.³ Commercial sex trafficking is usually associated with prostitution activities but it may include other forms of exploitation; including child pornography, live video child sex exploitation, and child sex tourism. The Internet Child Sex Exploitation (ICSE) website indicated that "in 2018, **one in seven** were likely victims of child sex trafficking."⁴ In the State of Texas, persons under the age of 18 cannot be prosecuted for prostitution and are considered to be victims of sex trafficking. In addition to minor victims, any person who engages in a commercial sex act (e.g., prostitution) by force, fraud, or coercion is a victim of sex trafficking in Texas.⁵ Texas is the first state to enact a law that makes buying sex from a victim a felony offense.⁶ Since 2007, the National Human Trafficking Hotline had 6,877 cases; of these 987 cases of human trafficking were reported in 2020.⁷ In 2020, according to Texas' Attorney General, "there were 1.6 million online commercial sex advertisements in Texas," and over 200,000 of the advertisements may have been exploited children.⁸ Law enforcement in Webb County, Texas, has been actively pursuing the arrest and prosecution of sex traffickers – local police sting operations and human trafficking task force team efforts resulted in multiple arrests and convictions for traffickers (buyers and sellers).⁹ Arresting buyers and sellers for child exploitation is important and one facet of eradicating

¹ Nierengarten, M.B. & Goldberg, A. (2018). Identify, screen, treat, and advocate for child victims of sex trafficking. *Contemporary Pediatrics* 35(12): 8-10.

² Busch-Armendariz, N. et al. (2016). Human trafficking by the numbers: The initial benchmark of prevalence and economic impact for Texas. Report from the Statewide Human Trafficking Mapping Project of Texas. University of Texas- Austin. See also: "6 Truths About Human Trafficking in Texas", <https://upbring.org/6-truths-about-human-trafficking-in-texas#:~:text=Researchers%20at%20the%20University%20of,are%20victims%20of%20labor%20trafficking>.

³ National Human Trafficking Hotline: Texas, <https://humantraffickinghotline.org/en/statistics/texas>

⁴ Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention (OJJDP). (Accessed December 15, 2020). Commercial Sexual Exploitation of Children. <https://ojjdp.ojp.gov/programs/commercial-sexual-exploitation-children>

⁵ Texas Penal Code, Title 5, Sec 20A. <https://statutes.capitol.texas.gov/Docs/PE/htm/PE.20A.htm>

⁶ Texas Attorney General, <https://www.texasattorneygeneral.gov/initiatives/human-trafficking>.

⁷ Human Trafficking Hotline. <https://humantraffickinghotline.org/state/texas>

⁸ Ken Paxton, Attorney General of Texas, <https://www.texasattorneygeneral.gov/human-trafficking-section/what-human-trafficking/sex-trafficking-texas>.

⁹ See: U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement (May 26, 2015), <https://www.ice.gov/news/releases/previously-convicted-south-texas-sex-offender-pleads-guilty-child-pornography-charges>; U.S. Attorney's Office (December 30,

commercial sexual exploitation. Arrest numbers are generally low considering the number of calls to hotlines – in calendar year 2023, Texas reported 360 crimes of commercial sex trafficking and 203 crimes of labor trafficking.¹⁰ Another important and essential tactic is to address the needs of victims who are exploited and help educate youth about the dangers posed by those seeking to sell children.

Webb County, Texas, has seen an increased rate of victimization between 2019 and 2021. In 2019, Webb County was ranked 29th in sex trafficking victimizations but was in the top ten communities of confirmed and unconfirmed sex trafficking cases in 2020.¹¹ Webb County, by year-end 2021, had a child sex trafficking risk score of 2.95 (the third highest recorded by Lighthouse); the county had 1,936 CSE-IT screenings with 1.50 % showing clear concern for child sexual exploitation. None of these cases had individual youth in coordinated care programs.¹²

Laredo, located in South Texas Webb County, is the largest inland port along the Mexican border with about 250,00 residents. The FBI's Uniform Crime Reports¹³ indicated that there were 67 arrests for human trafficking in Webb County in 2019; from 2022 to 2023, the local District Attorney's office processed 8 cases for prostitution. Problematically, the Lighthouse CSE-IT¹⁴ website indicated that youth are exploited for at least two years prior to being identified. In 2019, the number of children who had confirmed child abuse cases in Webb County numbered 655. If we estimate the number of potential victims using the CSE-IT tool and the number of female youth in Webb County, we could have 42 cases of sex trafficking concern among cases serviced singularly by juvenile justice personnel in Webb County.¹⁵ Given these juvenile justice probation estimates using CSE-IT, we estimate that there could be between 50 and 100 "clear" and "potential" cases of child sex trafficking in Webb County each year. On December 27, 2021, Child Protection Services screened their cases and informed Judge Mireles and the TEND Court that they screened 88 files and that 18 of these showed potential commercial sex exploitation and 5 cases showed clear concern. TEND Court in 2022-2023 has found that there are 14 cases of potential concern and 5 cases of clear concern in Judge Mireles' CPS Court. The TEND Court Executive Director regularly screens youth in Judge Mireles' Court using the CSE-IT to make sure that appropriate services can be extended to youth with clear or potential cause for concern. In 2023-2024, TEND Court identified 18 youth as having a clear or potential concern for exploitation, human trafficking or commercial sex exploitation risks. Since October 2024, TEND Court has been actively working with 14

2024), <https://www.justice.gov/usao-sdtx/pr/former-jailer-admits-sexually-assaulting-women>; KGNS (October 17, 2024), <https://www.kgns.tv/2024/10/17/lpd-makes-multiple-arrests-after-sting-operation/> ; LMTonline (October 17, 2024). <https://www.lmtonline.com/local/article/laredo-massage-parlor-prostitution-sexual-favors-19844204.php> .

¹⁰ NIBRIS - Uniform Crime Report System; Crime Volume by Offense, Texas – 2024, <https://txucr.nibrs.com/Report/TexasCITReport> .

¹¹ Texas Department of Family and Protective Services (2021). CPI Completed Investigations: Alleged & Confirmed Types of Abuse. DFPS Data Book <https://www.dfps.state.tx.us/About/DFPS/DataBook/ChildProtectiveInvestigations/Investigations/TypesofAbuse.asp>

¹² Lighthouse Report, 2021. file:///C:/Users/Fran%20B/Downloads/LighthouseReport%20-%20risk%20prevalence%20(1).pdf

¹³ Crime in Texas Online, <http://txucr.nibrs.com> (then click on Webb County in the interactive map).

¹⁴ The Lighthouse CSE-IT tool is used by the State of Texas to screen for sex trafficking victimization. [The Commercial Sexual Exploitation-Identification Tool \(CSE-IT\) \(texas.gov\)](https://www.texas.gov)

¹⁵ The CSE-IT training slides showed that juvenile probation found 1 in 10 clear cases of concern for sex trafficking victimization and an additional 2 in 10 cases of potential concern.

youth in and has an additional 14 in the process of being entered into TEND Court for a total of 28 youth to be served in the first and second quarter of the grant period.

To address the needs of exploited, human trafficked, and commercially exploited victims, the proposed project aims to continue the work of the Texas Emergency Network Diversion (TEND) Court. TEND Court “tends” to the needs of youth and young adults in Child Protection Court who are, or are likely to be, victims of exploitation, human trafficking, and commercially sexually trafficked. TEND Court will divert youth aged 10 through 22 who are facing exploitation, human trafficking, and commercial sexual exploitation away from the criminal justice and juvenile justice system involvement. In the first two years of the grant, youth under 18 were serviced, this grant cycle seeks to extend services to adults 18 through 22 who have been or are exploited, human trafficked, or commercially sexually trafficked after they leave or continue to have foster care services provided to them as they transition to independence, or who were in TEND Court as a youth. TEND Court will coordinate and collaborate with relevant agencies and social service providers, educational, and counseling diversion programs from a trauma-informed, victim-centered approach. TEND Court leads the way in diverting persons at risk of exploitation, human trafficking, and commercial sexual exploitation by coordinating an effort to identify, protect, and respond to intervention in a culturally and victim-sensitive manner. TEND Court will aim to provide a coordinated response for youth who may be and who are exploited sexually. This innovative program is the first of its kind in Texas; another program similar to it is in California where a CPS Court also seeks to assist commercially exploited victims. TEND Court is providing an innovative approach to addressing and eradicating exploitation, human trafficking, and commercial sexual exploitation of youth as the few “trafficking courts” that exist within Texas and around the nation focus on adults in the criminal justice system or in the juvenile justice system who have been charged with criminal offenses or delinquency. TEND Court is in a Child Protection Court in South Texas.

Who is at risk of commercial sexual exploitation?

The victims of sex trafficking are exploited by family, friends, or strangers who prey on vulnerable youth and young adults; if exploited by family or friends then the victims may have difficulty breaking free from their exploitation. Victims of sex trafficking can be exploited when: (1) a trafficker initiates or exploits a victim’s substance abuse issues, (2) a victim has a history of physical abuse, (3) a victim has a history of sexual abuse, (3) traffickers intimidate or threaten to harm the victim, and (4) a victim has a history of emotional or intimacy abuse. Minor victims of sex trafficking are looking for love, safety, security, and help. If not helped then child victims will suffer life-long complex PTSD, substance addictions, homelessness, engage in minor criminal offenses that include prostitution, may be runaways or throw-aways, experience teen-dating violence, and may have suicidal ideations. They also tend to be involved in the justice system, and child protection services, and/or are in a residential treatment centers.¹⁶ Young adults who have been sexually exploited and unable to leave their trafficker or unable to “leave the life” due to poor health, low self-esteem, drug/alcohol abuse problems, homelessness, poverty, lack of education, and social/familial support continue to sell their bodies and be commercially

¹⁶ Baird & Connelly (2021). Recruitment and entrapment pathways of minors into sex trafficking in Canada and the United States: A systematic review. *Trauma, Violence & Abuse*: 1-14 (first published online). <https://doi.org/10.1177%2F15248380211025241>

exploited sexually.¹⁷ Problematically, as the House of Representatives hearing reported in 2018, victims are hidden in plain sight.¹⁸ Victims do not come forward to report their abuse; they may have problems trusting any adult including, CPS case workers, family members, teachers, medical and mental health professionals and, law enforcement officers.¹⁹ Youth anecdotally say that they would not report abuse and exploitation because they did not trust the legal system and law enforcement to protect them and provide effective responses to the situation they live daily. Breaking the chain of abuse and trauma that leads to sexual exploitation is difficult but essential if a community is to help victims of sex trafficking. It is important to remember that sexually exploited victims may repeat patterns of abuse similar to victims of intimate partner/domestic violence.²⁰

Most victims in the United States are domestic youth who at young ages are sexually exploited. In Laredo/Webb County, as elsewhere, the risk factors for being sexually exploited and sex trafficked include sexual abuse before a youth's 18th birthday, poor school attendance, homelessness, physical and emotional family abuse, being a runaway, unhealthy relationships, self-harming behaviors (e.g., cutting), and substance use/abuse. Horrifically, there was a recent incident in 2020 where a young girl went to a party at a house in a remote area outside of Laredo, Texas. The youth was given drugs and was sexually assaulted all night long. She was later dropped back off at her house in a comatose condition. Without help, she could be sex trafficked by persons who exploit her young age, sexual victimization and trauma, and drug use. Indeed, she might have been commercially exploited that night. In 2021, two teenage girls were found unconscious on a plane at the Laredo airport and rushed to a local hospital.²¹ These girls were drugged and could have been victims of trafficking. In 2023, a woman was arrested for smuggling two girls and pretending that they were her children at a checkpoint outside Laredo.²² Among TEND Court youth who have been serviced, several have indicated that they were trafficked and one youth was trafficked into Mexico. These TEND Court youth reached out to the TEND Court judge, the Executive Director and some service providers for help in curbing their abuse and attending to their needs for housing, education, and other services. A few of the youth in TEND Court are members of a family who need assistance; some are males who are transitioning to independent living; and, some have run-away to their trafficker only to return for help and care in TEND Court.

Sex trafficking victimization is not limited to minors (persons under age 18). Young adults who were victims of abuse or sex trafficked as children are developmentally delayed and exploitation can continue into young adulthood (into their 20s).²³ Many victims who were sexually exploited and/or

¹⁷ Clayton et al. (2013). Confronting commercial sexual exploitation and sex trafficking of minors in the United States. Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention.

<https://ojjdp.ojp.gov/sites/g/files/xyckuh176/files/pubs/243838.pdf>; Haney et al. (2020). Sex trafficking in the United States: A scoping review. *Journal of Evidence-Based Social Work* 17(6): 714-748.

¹⁸ Subcommittee on Border and Maritime Security (2018). Hidden in plain sight: Understanding federal efforts to stop human trafficking. Committee on Homeland Security in the House of Representatives, second session, September 26, 2018. Serial No. 115-76. <H:\115THC~1\18BM0926\18BM0926.TXT> (govinfo.gov)

¹⁹ Hurst, T.E., (2019).

²⁰ Walsh, S.D. (2016). Sex trafficking and the state: Applying domestic violence interventions to serve victims of sex trafficking. *Human Rights Review* 17: 221-245.

²¹ KGNS.tv (December 20, 2021). Two teen girls found unresponsive on board a plane.

<https://www.kgns.tv/video/2021/12/20/two-teen-girls-found-unresponsive-board-plane/>

²² LMTonline (May 20, 2023). Woman tried smuggling 2 children via I-35 checkpoint. <https://www.lmtonline.com/local/article/smuggling-attempt-2-children-foiled-i-35-18109645.php>

²³ Clayton et al., (2013).

abused as youth continue as young adults to sell their bodies; these victims also face physical, sexual, and emotional abuse from their traffickers. Sexually exploited victims may have been gang raped, and as one study reported they have a homicide victimization rate of over 200 times that of their peers.²⁴ Problematically, young women who are convicted of human sex trafficking are usually arrested alongside male traffickers; the women assist the male traffickers in locating and selling other female victims. In the United States, these female traffickers had once been victims of sex trafficking.²⁵ TEND Court is a CPS court which can have extended jurisdiction over persons aged 18 through 22 if they were in foster care and voluntarily decide to continue to receive services. In 2025-2026, TEND Court and in collaboration with BCFS Common Thread will work with these young adults to continue to strengthen their resolve towards prosocial activities and independence – work, education, and self-care in dealing with their trauma.

Addressing the needs of minor victims and young adults from a trauma-informed approach is essential to thwart continued victimization and begin the healing process.²⁶ Communities and service agencies fail to recognize victims because victims may have bonded to their abusers and do not want to report them; they may be too young to understand and appreciate the significance of the abuse; and, they may be trapped and too afraid to seek help. It is important for providers to be mindful that the avenues which ensnare victims are inter-connected and victims may be choosing between two “bad” choices – stay in an abusive home or sell themselves to get money in an environment where the trafficker proclaims to love and care for the victim. Young adult victims require services to help them as they transition from foster care to independence. Across the United States, there are some diversion court programs that usually involve the juvenile justice and criminal justice system by identifying youth and young adults who are engaged in prostitution exploitation.²⁷ It is important to address the wider forms of commercial sex exploitation and to consider a community’s demographic needs. In South Texas, commercial sex exploitation victims may include youth exploited in online forums and may also include persons brought across the border. As a bilingual community, victims in Laredo may be ensnared by traffickers who exploit the vulnerability of persons who do not speak English, have no money, and have their passports taken or are given false birth certificates. Youth may want a way out of their sexual slavery but cannot do it alone; a networked response can identify victims who do not come directly in contact with the police and criminal justice system. A continuum of advocacy and trauma-informed care responses are needed to address the needs of victims where they are; realizing that young persons may return to their abusers many times before finally being strong enough to leave for good. Youths may not understand that they are being abused. The advocacy and care that the victims require will need to take into account that victims may not want to see the justice system involved and need counseling, residential and, health care services.

²⁴ Representative Wagner, A. & McCann, R.W. (2017). Prostitutes or prey?: The evolution of Congressional intent in combating sex trafficking. *Harvard Journal on Legislation* 54: 701-784.

²⁵ Clayton et al., (2013).

²⁶ Gerassi, L.B. & Nichols, A.J. (2018). Sex trafficking and commercial sexual exploitation: Prevention, advocacy, and trauma-informed practice. NY, NY: Springer Pub.

²⁷ Amara Legal Center. (2018). Survey of United States diversion programs: Sex work and sex trafficking. [survey-of-united-states-diversion-programs.pdf](#)

A localized South Texas response is critical to breaking the cycle of violence, manipulation, and abuse.²⁸ The local response must be victim-centered and must consider the multiple traumas sex trafficked victims experience. Additionally, the response should consider the issues that confound the crime of prostitution with human trafficking where persons are abused, manipulated, forced, coerced, and kept in a vulnerable state of being.²⁹ Providing services in both English and Spanish is needed in Laredo because a majority of Laredo residents speak Spanish as their primary language. Diversion court programs must provide for the emergency needs of victims from a victim-centered approach in responding to commercial sex exploitation: individuals need housing, assistance in dealing with physical and emotional abuse, substance abuse assistance, education, and the ability to be heard by professionals rendering assistance. Despite legislation at the state and federal levels of proscribing commercial sexual exploitation, laws alone cannot abate the offense without immediate policy changes and without governments providing the money to implement necessary changes.³⁰ An emergency networked response to sex trafficking is needed in South Texas; TEND Court fills the gaps by being proactive in filling gaps in care for exploited, human trafficked, commercially exploited, sex trafficked or abused foster youth and young adults seeking independence after leaving foster care.

TEND Court: Texas Emergency Network Diversion

Texas Emergency Network Diversion Court – TEND Court

This project named the Texas Emergency Network Diversion (TEND) Court is a specialty court overseen by Judge Selina Mireles in her Child Protection Court, 4th Judicial Region, located in Laredo/ Webb County, Texas. TEND Court coordinates cases in the Child Protection Court with services provided by an attorney, Child Protection Services, and a variety of social, educational, and counseling service providers (e.g.: BCFS Common Thread, counselors, and attorneys *ad litem*). TEND Court will use the CSE-IT tool to identify potential and clear cases of exploitation, human trafficking, and sexual exploitation during the grant period. Judge Mireles' Child Protective Services Court will hold a specialty court to oversee the identification and protection of the youth into trauma-informed social and mental health services as well as any medical or educational services needed to assist victims and survivors. The TEND Court Executive Director will provide TEND youth with educational sessions and meet with the youth so that they can be resilient and engage in self-advocacy. TEND Court will hire a part-time Administrative Assistant who will handle the day-to-day office work. TEND Court will hire a part-time Licensed Professional Counselor (LPC) to provide counseling services to fill gaps in service that might exist after educational sessions or when a youth is moved to a new foster placement, and standby services when the youth's counselor, therapist is not available, and youth is going through a crisis. The TEND Court personnel aim to ensure coordinated services adhering to the TEND Court process of service provision in accordance with the funded grant.

Sexually exploited/ trafficked victims and minors at risk of victimization are typically unidentified in South Texas; if they are identified at all it is usually after a severe trauma like a sexual assault or a teen brought to a medical center for services as described above. TEND Court seeks to identify and help potential and clear concern exploited, human trafficked, and sex trafficked minors by providing them

²⁸ Bernat, F.P. & Winkeller, H.C. (2010). Human sex trafficking: The global become local. *Women & Criminal Justice* 20(1-2): 186-192.

²⁹ Bernat & Winkeller, (2010); Walsh, (2016).

³⁰ Representative Wagner, A., & McCann, R.W., (2017).

with appropriate social, educational, medical, and mental health services; in this grant cycle, TEND Court also seeks to help young adults transitioning from foster care to independence with additional independent living support assistance. TEND Court opens a dynamic choice for victims to pursue – interconnected care to help victims see a new avenue to navigate toward safety and change the course of their life trajectory. TEND Court is a new specialty court in Texas which establishes a networked response to commercial sexual exploitation in Laredo/Webb County. TEND Court works with existing social, educational, and mental health service providers in Laredo/Webb County. Using an existing identification tool (CSE-IT) and ensuring a trauma-informed response (e.g., TBRI, Trauma Based Relational Intervention; Point of View educational stories, resilience programs), TEND Court will bring a coordinated response to the problem of exploitation in South Texas. TEND Court’s mission is “To protect and prevent youth and young adults from exploitation in South Texas and inspire change in their lives by having a network that provides advocacy, tailored support services, and a cohesive response to the needs of TEND Court clients”. To achieve success for youth, TEND Court’s smart goals are to build Trust, Encourage youth to excel, Nurture youth towards independence and self-care; and help youth Discover a world outside trauma.

The proposed grant program is overseen by Judge Mireles in the Child Protection Court. TEND Court creates a culture of support and engenders the premise that all children are in need of protection from commercial sex exploitation and can be provided the legal, medical, mental health, educational, and social service support necessary to progress into a healthy and meaningful adulthood. TEND Court seeks to “burn the candle at both ends.” TEND Court is not just a typical specialty court program. Sex trafficking courts usually operate out of the juvenile probation system and identify traditionally defined youth at risk because they were arrested and in the juvenile justice system. In those courts, treatment can be mandated as a condition of probation or release from confinement as opposed to providing trauma-informed care.³¹ We know that some youth may be arrested for prostitution and claim to be over 18 years of age but are later determined to be minors. Under Texas law, such minors cannot be prosecuted for prostitution because state law classifies these youth as victims of human trafficking. Thus, TEND Court might get potential referrals from juvenile probation for these minors but will perform a CSE-IT assessment for Child Protective Services youth who are not justice-system involved. TENDING to youth and young adults who are sexually enslaved is imperative. It is important to consider the victim’s needs first and ensure their continued safety and well-being. The Laredo/Webb County, and the community are ready to work together to address and abate this form of modern-day slavery by sustaining a Texas Emergency Network Diversion (TEND) Court to identify and care for sex trafficked minors and young adults.

In sum, this program creates a network of legal, social services, non-profit, and support programs and services designed to identify minors and young adults who might be exploited and assist them with counseling and social services (e.g., trust-based counseling, animal therapy, mentoring, summer camps, foster care, career trajectories, survivor leader peer support, educational liaison, etc.). Children at risk of sexual exploitation might be first identified using the CSE-IT tool if they have a case being heard in Judge Mireles’ Child Protective Services Court or identified by the Child Protection Court or other service providers. TEND Court aims to identify foster care minors and young adults who were in foster care and, who have risk factors associated with trafficking before they are sexually exploited.

³¹ Shdaimah, C.S. (Prostitution/ human trafficking courts: Policy frontline as fault line. *Texas Law Review Online* 96: 1-9. <https://texaslawreview.org/prostitution-human-trafficking-courts/>

TEND Court also aims to identify minors and young adults transitioning from foster care who are commercially exploited and help them escape their exploitation and sexual slavery.

Program and services information

TEND Court will have direct oversight in Judge Mireles' Child Protection Court for the grant period October 1, 2025, through September 30, 2026. Judge Mireles will employ a person to administer the program and coordinate the identification of sex-trafficked minors and young adults as Executive Director of TEND Court - Ms. Eliza Cavazos. Victims will be identified using the CSE-IT tool and TEND Court personnel and stakeholders have been trained or, will be trained in its use. TEND Court will work with social and legal service providers to determine what services are necessary to respond to the multiple traumas and the immediate specific service needs of the victim of exploitation. These providers are required to be trained in the use of CSE-IT, have exploitation, human trafficking, and commercial sexual exploitation of children training, and utilize TBRI or other trauma informed care responses. It is estimated that over the year of the grant 20 to 40 youth will be in need of specific services either because of clear or potential concern for exploitation, human trafficking, and commercial sexual exploitation.

Judge Mireles will convene the TEND Court sessions according to the youth's specific needs of concern (e.g.: weekly, biweekly, monthly, as needed.). Judge Mireles will oversee those individuals who are between the ages of 10 and 22 who have risk factors for commercial sex exploitation (housing insecurity; criminal arrest; changes in physical health or appearance; poverty; drug/alcohol use and/or abuse; history of sexual, physical, or emotional abuse as a youth; sexual activity or pregnancy; family violence; teen dating violence). She will maintain a separate non-statutory docket to ensure that victims or potential victims are identified and assisted. Some of the victims might be referred by Child Protective Services and have risk factors: child abuse; sex abuse; homelessness; homelessness; runaway/ throw-away; drug/alcohol use or abuse. All identified children will have an attorney assigned to represent them in the specialty court. Appropriate counseling, medical, educational, and empowerment services will be provided to identified youth in the program.

The TEND Executive Director will ensure that victims receive appropriate and tailored services to address their risk factors and trauma needs while satisfying the legal requirements of the cases filed in the courts. TEND Court programs will include emergency services available through the Child Protection Court (e.g., temporary or permanent managing conservatorship of a minor). Placement of a minor with a particular counseling agency or with a TEND Court or with a TEND Court LPC may be assigned to ensure that the emotional and psychological needs of a youth are met. The TEND Court LPC will have TBRI, CSE-IT and other human trafficking trainings for working with youth at risk of exploitation. In addition, Emergency Movement Desensitization and Reprocessing (EMDR) will be utilized, as appropriate, when minors are assigned programs. EMDR has been shown to be effective for treating persons who experience post-traumatic stress; for use with victims of human trafficking, EMDR is showing promise for addressing complex trauma.³² Counselors will be assigned if they have been trained to work with human trafficking victims and children at risk of exploitation. Judge Mireles and the TEND Executive

³² Hepburn, S. (July 2017). *EMDR Therapy Used to Neutralize Human Trafficking Trauma*. National Association of State Mental Health Program Directors (NASMHPD). Alexandria, Virginia.
<https://www.nasmhpd.org/sites/default/files/EMDR-THERAPY-USED-TO-NEUTRALIZE-HUMAN-TRAFFICKING-TRAUMA%20REVISED.pdf>

Director will also ensure that the victims have assigned legal counsel to represent them and work and work with a consultant who assesses trafficking courts.

In addition, Judge Mireles, the Executive Director and staff will continue to receive training and attend conferences on human trafficking. In order to provide victims and victim-survivors in the TEND Court with the support and care that they need, it is important for the Executive Director, Judge Mireles, legal and social service advocates, and service providers to collaborate and communicate with each other. In its first two years, TEND Court received mentoring support from the National Council of Juvenile and Family Court Judges on how to provide assistance to children who were being commercially exploited. The preliminary assessment of the process evaluation and the NCJFC mentoring is that TEND Court is being successful at identify youth and providing services. TEND Court will respond to the Office of Governor (OOG) requests for specific evaluation measures if requested during the grant period. At the end of the grant period, a final research report will be delivered to the Texas State Governor's Office on the program services delivered.

Target population: Who will be served?

TEND Court will provide specialty services to minors (aged 10 through 17) who are identified using the CSE-IT tool in the Child Protection Court. These minors who are at clear or potential risk of sexual exploitation will likely come to TEND Court attention via the use of the CSE-IT tool or through a referral from another agency. Youth who are transitioning from CPS custody may elect to have extended care from age 18 through 22; if the transition young adult was in TEND Court as a minor then he or she will have extended TEND Court services. Young adults who were in foster care and are being exploited or realized they were exploited as foster youth may also seek assistance from TEND Court. We expect between 20 and 40 youth will be serviced in this program. If youth or young adults have been commercially exploited, then they will be part of TEND Court. If youth or young adults who have the potential of commercial exploitation, sex trafficking or abuse then they will be voluntarily asked to participate. Once a youth has agreed to be part of TEND Court then the youth will stay with TEND Court services and support until the youth has exited from CPS custody, conservatorship, or from extended care at age 22. TEND Court wraps around the youth at risk of exploitation, human trafficking, sex trafficking or abuse, or who has been exploited; as needs increase, then service attention will be focused on the needs of the youth. If youth are showing progress, then directed attention on the youth can be relaxed. Youth will choose when they desire to speak with the judge; the judge will ensure space on her docket as is needed for those in TEND Court.

Performance management

The TEND Executive Director will oversee the specialty court's work with Judge Mireles. If a child comes into contact with child protective services or the Child Protection Court, then the CSE-IT tool will be used to determine if the child is being or at risk of exploitation, human trafficking, commercial sexual exploitation, or abuse. Once identified, the TEND Executive Director will coordinate a response that is trauma-informed. The objective is to identify children who are being exploited, human trafficked, trafficked or at risk of being commercially sexually exploited and to provide effective services which are individualized to the victim and coordinated among TEND Court stakeholders. TEND Court will not force service providers to violate any confidences of their clients, but TEND Court will be available to assist service providers to coordinate care and victim services across the City of Laredo/ Webb County. The

TEND Court Executive Director will provide a 5- part module training using My Life My Choice³³ – an evidence-based program designed for youth at risk of exploitation. At the end of each quarter, the TEND Court Executive Director will assess each youth in the program to determine the efficacy of the services provided. If you need to have specific services then the youth will be provided a second phase to the module training that specifically addresses the youth's needs (e.g., healthy relationships, job training and resume building, educational goal attainment, drug treatment referrals). Young adults in TEND Court will be provided assistance services as they transition into independence or continue under CPS conservatorship. Because youth experiencing trauma may be triggered at any time, TEND Court will be cognizant of the stages of trauma and work with networked members to reduce and address youth trauma.

Data management

The TEND Executive Director will oversee the collection and analysis of all data collected on TEND youth, the court processes, and the services provided. Dr. Bernat will assist Executive Director upon request to meet OOG data requirements. This data will be kept confidential and any identifiable information will not be disclosed; including the specific CSE-IT assessment analysis scores. Data analysis will be in the aggregate to determine if TEND Court is effective at identifying and providing services to victims and potential victims of sex trafficking through this innovative court. Dr. Bernat was a Principal Investigator of truancy diversion programs and other youth resilience research programs. She is a skilled qualitative and quantitative research design analyst and will perform her consultation work with ethical social science research protocols that maintain victim and provider confidentiality while tracking the efficacy of services and identification protocols. Individual analysis on TEND Court youth will be performed regularly by the Executive Director to ascertain how TEND Court is operating and to make changes to program implementation as needed. TEND Court is a program with multiple layers and it will be important to determine how the interconnections among agencies and people facilitate service delivery to victims. Every three months a preliminary report will be submitted; a final report will be prepared at the end of the grant period.

Approach & activities

Critical personnel associated with the specialty court program have (or will have) Trauma - Based Relational Intervention (TBRI)³⁴ training and/or CSE-IT training. TEND personnel includes Judge Mireles and the TEND Executive Director Ms. Eliza Cavazos, Attorneys Ad Litem assigned to the youth, and related service providers (e.g., Child Protective Services and counselors). We know that youth may not know or understand that they are being exploited. We know that victims may not want to engage in services or say that they are being exploited, sex trafficked, abused, or commercially exploited. We know that victims may go back to their traffickers again and again. We know that children may not understand the nature and extent of their victimization and trauma and blame themselves. We will address this with a culture of hope and resilience for each TEND Court youth/young adult.

1. Training and travel: The TEND Court personnel already have completed CSE-IT and TBRI training. Other training on exploitation, human trafficking and sexual exploitation of youth will occur as

³³ My Life My Choice, <https://www.mylifemychoice.org/why-it-matters> .

³⁴ Karyn Purvis Institute. Trust- Based Relational Intervention. Texas State University. <https://child.tcu.edu/about-us/tbri/#sthash.lfO4mEBY.dpbs>

needed during the grant's administration. In some instances, there may be a need to travel for in-person training and/or meet with collaborators outside of Webb County (in another part of Texas or in another state). Discussions with other sex trafficking court judges may also take place during the grant period.

2. Data collection: An initial CSE-IT assessment will occur upon referral. Reports will be presented on a quarterly basis with a final report submitted at the end of the 2026 grant period. Generalized data on the TEND Court youth will be reported to protect their anonymity. Outcome measures will be provided in quarterly reports to indicate how many youth or young adults are in TEND Court and the number of successes or setbacks a youth or young adult experienced (getting a job, not running away, drug or alcohol use, etc.). The reports will also indicate completion of, or the setting of youth goals and self-advocacy (e.g., My Life My Choice module completion, therapy services provided and whether the youth was able to overcome a crisis change). It is not the aim of TEND Court to have youth "exit" as if there is a linear end of services provided. Rather, exploited youth are given services to enable them to recognize risks and overcome adversity in their lives. Small success at completing tasks (attending a module, asking for help, attending counseling services, attending school, recognizing risks and ameliorating them) will be identified.
3. Service delivery by select personnel: TEND Court is culturally competent when providing services to victims. The Texas Emergency Network Diversion (TEND) Court program employs culturally competent victim services with sensitivity for victims. The TEND Court Judge and the TEND Court Executive Director are bilingual members of Laredo/Webb County community which provides services to minors. The TEND Executive Director ensures that discussions with minors and parents are in the language of their choice and that services provided are appropriate so as to not re-victimize minors. The TEND Executive Director while employed by the Webb County Sheriff's Office, completed 8 CEUs in Cultural Diversity, as required to do every four years by the Texas Commission on Law Enforcement (TCOLE), to keep her correctional license active. On December 17, 2022, she recertified by completing the same Cultural Diversity course, and continuing her correctional license active status for an additional four years, as required by TCOLE. The TEND Court Judge is sensitive and caring and ensures that the minor's best interests are protected. Each minor and young adult (client) in the TEND Court program is provided a legal advocate if necessary.
4. Service delivery: TEND Court is overseen by Judge Mireles. She ensures that youth in her CPS Court who are, or who are at risk of exploitation, human trafficked, commercial exploitation, sex trafficking and abuse are identified and offered admittance into TEND Court. Once admitted, the services provided by the TEND Executive Director include training modules from My Life My Choice, educational sessions, and community activities and ensure that the minors have a safe, inclusive, non-discriminatory, culturally competent, and healthy learning environment. Each youth is provided time to work with the TEND Executive Director while attending the preventive CSEC sessions (My Life My Choice), as they may share their feelings, needs, and hopes for a better future. A counselor will be available to youth who may have a "triggered reaction" to a session so that the youth can get immediate assistance. TEND Court Executive Director ensures that each youth has the particularized services needed by working with community partners. If a young adult transitioning out of CPS custody extends their care and if they were previously admitted into TEND Court, then they may continue to seek services through TEND Court. TEND Court's judge and Executive Director will prioritize the demands of each youth and respond to the crises that the particular TEND Court client (youth or young adult) experience. If youth have completed the initial 5 CSEC training modules then

a Phase 2 of in-depth training sessions and preventive care will be specifically focused on the identified needs of the youth (e.g., substance abuse, unhealthy/healthy relationships, job and career training, educational attainment, meeting and setting life goals, building healthy relationships, independent transitioning from CPS care and custody).

5. Culturally specific and underserved populations: Underserved populations include persons who face barriers in accessing and using victim services; including persons who are underserved because of their geographic location, age, religion, gender, racial and ethnic identity, special needs (such as language barriers, disabilities, alienage status, or age), and any other population determined to be underserved by the Attorney General or by the Secretary of Health and Human Services. Culturally specific means the program is primarily directed toward racial and ethnic minority groups (as defined in section 1707(g) of the Public Health Service Act (42 U.S.C. 300u-6(g))). Racial and ethnic minority group means American Indians (including Alaska Natives, Eskimos, and Aleuts); Asian Americans; Native Hawaiians and other Pacific Islanders; Blacks; and Hispanics- Hispanic means individuals whose origin is Mexican, Puerto Rican, Cuban, Central or South American, or any other Spanish-speaking country.

TEND Court serves Hispanic minor males and females who may be or are at risk of exploitation, human trafficking, and commercial exploitation, sex trafficking or abuse. The youth are primarily from poor families along the southern border of Texas. The community is 95 percent Hispanic and the majority of the households served have parents who primarily or only speak Spanish; the children in TEND Court are bilingual and primarily speak Spanish at home. Webb County has limited services for youth at risk of sexual commercial exploitation and TEND Court is designed to work with children in the Child Protection Court. Children in CPS Court are at heightened risk for commercial sexual exploitation and there currently is no emergency housing for these youth. TEND Court is committed to implementing culturally sensitive programs for this underserved population of minors who are in great need of help and services that can divert them from any risk of exploitation. TEND Court ensures that the community service providers they collaborate with are trained, inclusive, and non-discriminatory, and provide culturally competent services designed to meet the specific needs of the target population, as TEND Court is inclusive and non-discriminatory.

6. TEND Court network: Once youth are identified as a clear or possible concern, then the TEND Court Executive Director will discuss specialty court options that enable a victim-centered, trauma-informed approach with Judge Mireles and the Child Protection Court service providers. It is expected that youth who are clear concerns are part of TEND Court; if the youth is a potential concern then the youth can be part of TEND Court if they agree. Trauma experience by these youth and young adults is lifelong and may thus TEND Court recognizes that youth do not “exit” programs just because they are 18 years of age or have completed a Phase 1 educational component. Nothing in the TEND Court’s operational plan negates the CPS federal requirement for parental unification. Most (if not all of the youth) are in CPS conservatorship; most of the youth who have been in TEND Court has exited because they aged out of CPS custody and control.
 - a. Youth in child protective services court will be given services in response to their immediate emergency needs for housing, security, safety, education, counseling, medical treatment, etc.
 - i. Legal/court services might include, but are not limited to:
 1. Legal representation

2. Child Protection Court services for emergency housing, conservator placements, etc.
 3. Bilingual court services with an English/Spanish-certified language translator.
- ii. Specialty court treatment services may include, but are not limited to:
1. Risk assessment for exploitation, human trafficking, and commercial sex exploitation. The TEND Court Executive Director will perform this, and work with the courts and other service providers to determine whether someone is being exploitation, human trafficking, and commercially sexually exploited or at risk of being trafficked throughout the grant period.
 2. Foster care placement or intensive treatment program. Judge Mireles's court can set up appropriate placements in accordance with the usual practice in her courtroom.
 3. Serving Children and Adults in Need (SCAN) drug & alcohol treatment for individuals/families.
 4. SCAN services for youth who are runaways/ throw-aways. SCAN has a program for these youth and if SCAN identifies victims who are at risk of being sex trafficked then SCAN can work alongside TEND Court to provide services.
 5. PILLAR services for youth in need of counseling and support services. The Executive Director will meet with TEND Court youth and young adults at the PILLAR offices and PILLAR counselors will be available for particularized counseling services.
 6. Child Advocacy Center (CAC) for youth who require counseling and court advocacy for victims of child abuse and neglect and have risk factors for child sexual exploitation.
 7. Common Thread is an advocacy group providing services for commercially exploited youth; as a part of BCFS Health and Human Services, Common Thread provides services for child victims as well as family support programs.
 8. Group counseling by a TEND Court counselor to provide assistance to TEND Court youth who may experience a "triggered" event after court or a TEND Court module session. The counselor may also provide additional individual counseling with a minor when appropriate to assist the minor develop coping skills. The counselor will be available to hold a group session with the care givers of TEND Court youth (e.g., parents, foster parents, etc.).
 9. Education – tutoring and mentoring. The TEND Executive Director (and/or Judge Mireles) will identify the needs of youth, and work to place youth in appropriate tutoring and mentoring services. The placement can happen after the TEND Court meets with the youth or at any point during the grant period. A coordinated program will be offered by the TEND Executive Director, with 5 My Life My Choice module sessions, in order to engage minors in empowerment activities that will enable them to develop goals for their future and find a pathway toward success. Each youths' goals and

pathways to independence and risk avoidance are different. It is not how quickly a youth achieves a goal, TEND Court will respond to the needs of each youth/ young adult. Their achievements will be recognized no matter how small. TEND Court recognizes that some youth will have regressions, and it will be important for TEND Court to “catch youth” and be a net(work) as the youth grows and learns.

10. Education – GED courses – mentoring and tutoring about college. The Executive Director of TEND will connect with local universities and colleges; minors in the program can take tours of the campuses and get pre-college counseling on how to apply to college and get scholarships.
11. Mentoring to be aware of the crime of sex trafficking. TEND Court will work with youth programs, community agencies, religious groups, and schools to provide educational programs or workshops on sex trafficking lures and how youth can protect themselves. Teacher programs within Laredo/Webb County that offer mentorship opportunities will be identified so that they can partner with TEND Court.
12. Summer educational camps for youth (summer 2024). The TEND Executive Director will provide youth with educational opportunities during the summer.
13. Animal therapy – Cuidado de Animales (Tending Animals). Pet therapy has been shown to be effective with persons who experience trauma. Laredo/Webb County currently has an equine therapy component and TEND Court is currently working to have the equine therapy group extend their services and contract with the TEND Court. Currently, there is not a local dog therapy program in the Webb County area. Animal therapy can be effective at reducing anxiety and a range of physical and mental health issues. Because some victims may not understand the words “equine” and “equine therapy”, we thought that the Spanish phrase Cuidado de Animales for Tending Animals might be more amenable to victims. We don’t want victims to think of animal therapy to be confused with one on one or group counseling, we want youth to have a positive immediate response when asked if they will participate in Cuidado de Animales because the animals will tend to the victims while the victims tend to the animals.
14. Art Therapy, like animal therapy, can be therapeutic. TEND Court’s Executive Director will host art sessions for youth so that if they do not want to, or are unable to express themselves verbally then they may be able to express their feelings through drawing or coloring.
15. Medical services if necessary to assist youth with their physical health (e.g., bruises, pregnancy, etc.).
16. Brand/Tattoo removal services or brand/tattoo replacement. Victims can decide if they want a brand/tattoo removed or covered up so that they can begin to reclaim their identities and transition away from being “owned” and sold by traffickers.

17. Backpacks filled with personal care items and an activity kit will be provided to youth. TEND Court Executive Director will mail a backpack with tooth brushes, coloring books, pens and paper to each TEND Youth. If a youth is relocated to a new housing situation, then the Executive Director will ensure that a new backpack will be sent to her or him. Contact information with TEND Court will be included in the backpack.

Evidence-based practices

The proposed TEND Court program supports the current efforts of the Texas Governor's Office to address the sexual exploitation of its citizens. The stated mission of Texas' Child Sex Trafficking Team is to "build sustainable capacity, enhance expertise, promote policies, and create new and leverage existing collaborations: * to protect children from sexual exploitation; *help the public recognize the signs of sexual exploitation; * help victims recover; *support healing; *bring justice to those who exploit children."³⁵ TEND Court aims to help the State of Texas achieve its mission in South Texas by creating a specialty court program that utilizes and leverages existing legal and court personnel and existing social and mental health service while engaging in objective research to ensure that victims of sex trafficking have the assistance they need to be identified, supported and given resources for healing. Persons who exploit child victims will be addressed by the Child Protective Services Court process.

Sex trafficking victims experience multiple traumas and are difficult to identify for many reasons: they may have "clustered" risk factors from early life experiences³⁶, they are afraid to report their victimization because they may be afraid of their trafficker and law enforcement³⁷, they may have bonded with their trafficker³⁸, they may not know that they are victimized, they may not know whom to trust and how to get help³⁹. TEND Court is a unique specialty court and will use a trauma-informed approach and is a unique specialty court. The approach aims to extend a network of resources already existing in Laredo/Webb County to the identification of youth victims of sexual exploitation. Multidisciplinary approaches are recommended to respond to the multiple needs of victims because of the severe forms of trauma that they have experienced.⁴⁰ Programs and service providers need to be flexible⁴¹ and ensure that they enable victims to participate voluntarily.

³⁵ Office of the Texas Governor, Greg Abbott. Child Sex Trafficking Team.

<https://gov.texas.gov/organization/cjd/childsextrafficking>

³⁶ Countryman-Roswurm, K. & Bolin, B.L. (2014). Domestic minor sex trafficking: Assessing and reducing risk. *Child Adolescence Social Work* 31: 521-538. DOI 10.1007/s10560-014-0336-6.

³⁷ Helfferich, C., Kavemann, B., & Rabe, H. (2011). Determinants of the willingness to make a statement of victims of human trafficking for the purpose of sexual exploitation in the triangle offender-police-victim. *Trends in Organized Crime* 14(2): 125-147 DOI 10.1007/s12117-011-9125-1.

³⁸ Reid, J.A., (2014). Entrapment and enmeshment schemes used by sex traffickers. *Sexual Abuse* 28(6): 491-511. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1079063214544334>.

³⁹ Hardy, V.L., Compton, K.D., & McPhatter, V.S. (2013). Domestic minor sex trafficking: Practice implications for mental health professionals. *Affilia: Journal of Women and Social Work* 28(10): 8-18. DOI: 10.1177/0886109912475172.

⁴⁰ Orme, J. & Ross-Sheriff, F. (2015). Sex trafficking: Policies, programs and services. *Social Work* <https://ht-radar.abolishhumantrafficking.com/wp-content/uploads/2020/07/Orme-Ross-Sheriff-2015-Sex-Trafficking.pdf>. doi: 10.1093/sw/swv031.

⁴¹ Litam, S.D.A. (2017). Human sex trafficking in America: What counselors need to know. *The Professional Counselor* 7(1): 45-61. doi:10.15241/sdal.7.1.45.

Sex trafficking courts tend to have a singular focus. It is important for criminal justice agencies to be aware of risk factors and to investigate situations that may indicate victims of domestic sexual exploitation.⁴² A “multi-dimensional” approach which indicates the complexity of persons and agencies responding to sex trafficking in the identification and prosecution of cases is important; in short, “human trafficking cannot be approached by a linear or simplified lens and requires a holistic perspective on the complex interactions between the criminal justice system and the human trafficking system that it seeks to combat”.⁴³ Successful programs use resilience models and use research designs that look at multiple risk factors.⁴⁴ Sex trafficking identification and victims’ aftercare once they are identified need accurate documentation of service provision⁴⁵. The TEND Court will assess the efficacy of the program while it is being implemented so that changes and additional resources can be provided to youth as needed; the services need to be tailored to the youth and be responsive to the victim’s needs.

TEND Court is in the beginning of its fourth year of operation. The first two years of its operation were devoted to forming the court’s program and delivery of services; this third year was devoted to establishing how each member of the network can fit together with services and support for the TEND Court youth/ young adults. TEND Court integrates multi-disciplinary knowledge on sex trafficking with multidimensional agency responses which address the needs of individual victims in the multi-jurisdictional legal environment of Laredo and Webb County in South Texas. According to SAMHSA (the national Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration, n.d.),⁴⁶ SMART programs have objectives (program goals) that are:

- **Specific** – The objective clearly states, so anyone reading it can understand, what will be done and who will do it.
- **Measurable** – The objective includes how the action will be measured. Measuring the objectives helps you determine if you are making progress. It keeps you on track and on schedule.
- **Achievable** – The objective is realistic given the realities faced in the community. Setting reasonable objectives helps set the project up for success
- **Relevant** – A relevant objective makes sense, that is, it fits the purpose of the grant, it fits the culture and structure of the community, and it addresses the vision of the project.
- **Time-bound** – Every objective has a specific timeline for completion.

TEND Court in Laredo, Webb County, Texas has the following program objectives (goals):

⁴² Walker-Rodriguez, A. & Hill, R. (2011). Human sex trafficking. *FBI Enforcement Bulletin*.
<https://leb.fbi.gov/articles/featured-articles/human-sex-trafficking>.

⁴³ Van der Watt, M. & van der Westhuizen, A. (2017). (Re)Configuring the criminal justice response to human trafficking: A complex-systems perspective. *Police Practice and Research* 18(3): 218-229, p. 218.
<https://doi.org/10.1080/15614263.2017.1291560>.

⁴⁴ Countryman-Roswurm, K. & Bolin, B.L. (2014).

⁴⁵ Muraya, D.N., & Fry, D. (2015). Aftercare services for child victims of sex trafficking: A systematic review of policy and practice. *Trauma, Violence & Abuse* 17(2): 204-220. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1524838015584356>

⁴⁶ SAMHSA (n.d.) Setting goals and developing specific measurable, achievable, relevant, and time-bound objectives. <https://www.samhsa.gov/sites/default/files/nc-smart-goals-fact-sheet.pdf>

1. Identify minor victims who are at risk of being exploited, human trafficked, and sex trafficked.
2. Identify minor victims who are being sex trafficked.
3. Provide individualized trauma-informed care to identified youth and young adults in CPS court.
4. Coordinate identification and trauma-informed care responses among TEND Court, attorney's ad litem, and various social services, educational, medical, and mental health service providers.
5. Provide program process assessment to identify and respond to any logistical problems with TEND Court implementation.
6. Provide program reports evaluating the services of TEND Court.

First and Second Objectives: To identify and provide services for minors who are, or may be, victims of sex trafficking; all TEND Court program personnel will be trained in CSE-IT to identify victims. We estimate that there will be 20 to 40 youth and young adults serviced in TEND Court. Some of these youth will be persons who are continuing to be in TEND Court from a prior year of service. The TEND Executive Director will be responsible for collecting and reporting administrative and case data on a quarterly basis to the relevant stakeholders (October 1, 2024, through September 30, 2025). Dr. Bernat will assist the Executive Director in the process evaluation and monitoring of TEND Court.

Third and Fourth Objectives: Each month of the grant, The TEND Executive Director will work with the TEND Court judge, Judge Mireles, to ensure that legal, social service, educational, medical, and mental health care providers will provide services and advocacy for each of the victims assigned to the court. These services will have a trauma-informed care perspective (via TBRI training and/or other academic training in trauma-informed care). Once or twice each month, Judge Mireles will hold a TEND Court for trafficking victim session, as caseload requires. Judge Mireles and the Executive Director are both trained in CSE-IT and TBRI and will also ensure that TEND Court identification of minors and service protocols are followed. As the case proceeds, the TEND Executive Director will ensure that identified minors are appropriately placed in services, that the youth/young adult is voluntarily consenting to participate and that all data collected by the coordinator maintains appropriate legal, social service, educational, medical, and mental health confidences. The TEND Executive Director will ensure that legal representation is provided to these individuals and that the individual receives appropriate services assigned by the specialty courts. The TEND Executive Director will provide regular reports to Judge Mireles on the services provided and if individuals in the program successfully completed and/or participated in the services provided. It is not the intent of this program to force participation; the TEND Executive Director will be responsible for ensuring compliance and that legal and mental health providers have their professional and ethical obligations for confidentiality maintained.

Fifth and Sixth Objectives: The TEND Court program evaluation process will be conducted by the TEND Executive Director with the youth's unidentifiable information, and present all data in the aggregate. All data will have individuals identified by a unique case identification number so that the individual placed in the TEND Court program can be tracked over the course of the year. The listing of the name of the individual provided service and their case identification number will be held by the TEND Executive Director in the 4th Judicial District office. *First*, the TEND Executive

Director will provide quarterly reports. *Second*, the TEND Executive Director will write a final program report for the Texas State Governor's Office.

TEND Court offers unique contributions to the State of Texas; in South Texas, TEND Court will:

- create a specialty court to prevent youth from commercial exploitation, sex trafficking or abuse;
- create a network of legal, social, and mental health providers to respond to commercial sex exploitation of youth;
- use trained CSE-IT legal, social and mental health providers to identify victims and persons at risk of sexual exploitation;
- protect youth who are victims or potential victims of sex trafficking;
- provide trauma-informed care services to sex trafficked victims to help them recover and heal; increase their self-confidence, promote self-efficacy and divert them from continued or threatened risk sex trafficking victimization;
- increase community awareness and response to sex trafficking;
- promote justice for victims by helping victims leave their traffickers; and,
- provide effective and objective evaluation.

TEND Activities and Timeline	Oct	Nov	Dec	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep
Pre-program Research – assess the 2024-2025 TEND Program	X											
Hire/Rehire TEND Executive Director	X											
TEND Identification of Victims	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
TEND Specialty Court Program	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
TEND CSEY Advocate(s)	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
TEND Legal Representation Services	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
TEND Victim Social Services	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
TEND Victim Education/ Mentoring	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
TEND Victim Mental Health Services	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
TEND EMDR	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
TEND Data Collection	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
TEND 3-mo Report			X			X			X			
TEND Service Modification (if needed)	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
TEND Training and Travel (as needed)	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
TEND Final Report												X

Capabilities of Persons Directly Involved in TEND Specialty Court Operations and Evaluation

There are a number of persons and agencies who will be involved in various components of the TEND Court program. The following are the critical persons who will implement TEND Court to ensure that services are provided and evaluated. These individuals work with associated agencies (e.g., juvenile probation, child protective services, child advocacy center, mental health providers, domestic violence shelters, etc.) and will ensure that the program is identifying children at risk of sexual exploitation and those who are presently being exploited.

Honorable Tano E. Tijerina, Webb County Judge, is the Webb County Judge in Laredo, Texas. He was born and raised in Laredo, Texas, Webb County Judge Tano Tijerina's life has been shaped by core values of hard work, commitment, dedication, respect and community service. Judge Tijerina graduated from J.W. Nixon High School in 1992 and continued his studies at Navarro Junior College in Corsicana Texas. He graduated from Texas A & M International University in 2002 with a Bachelor's Degree in fitness and sports and a minor in criminal justice.

Judge Tijerina's core values fueled him to run for Webb County Judge and initiate a new era for Webb County. Sworn into Office on January 1, 2015, Judge Tijerina became the 15th County Judge. During his first term, Judge Tijerina tackled some of the county's most difficult problems including a \$12-million-dollar shortfall in county revenues due to the decline in monies from oil and natural gas property taxes. While taking on enormous challenges, he also reimaged how the county delivers its most basic services. Judge Tijerina was reelected to serve his second term in office on January 1, 2019. During his time in office he has not only focused on reshaping county government but bringing awareness to much needed causes such as, mental health, domestic violence, safeguarding our environment, and aiding students to take an interest in their local government.

Judge Selina Mireles, Associate Judge, 4th and 5th Administrative Judicial Districts of the Child Protection Court for Webb, Zapata, Duval, and Jim Hogg Counties

The Honorable Selina Mireles is the Associate Judge of the Child Protection Court for the 4th and 5th Administrative Judicial Districts. She also presides over the Webb County Family Drug Treatment Court for parties who have pending child protection cases. The Webb County Family Drug Treatment Court is a drug court that uses TBRI (Trust Based Relational Intervention) methods for parents and children to provide a greater chance of family reunification and build stronger and healthier family units. Judge Mireles received a Bachelor of Arts from the University of Texas at Austin and was awarded a Juris Doctorate from the University of Texas School of Law where she was an active member of the Chicano Hispanic Law Students Association and the Children's Rights Clinic. Judge Mireles also received a certification in mediation from the University School of Law Center of Public Policy Dispute Resolution.

Prior to her judicial appointment in 2015, Judge Mireles practiced fifteen years in the areas of family law, civil litigation (including a focus on medical malpractice), juvenile and adult criminal law, probate and guardianship law, and child protective services cases representing children, parents, and interveners.

Judge Mireles is currently a member of the Laredo-Webb County Bar Association, the Laredo Women's Bar Association, the Hispanic National Bar Association, Texas Latinx Judges, National Association of Women Judges (NAWJ), National Council of Juvenile and Family Court Judges, Member (NCJFCJ), National Association of Drug Court Professionals (NADCP), Children at Risk (Texas Statewide Anti-Demand Coalition), Chair of the Supreme Court of Texas Permanent Judicial Commission for Children, Youth, and Families (Texas Children's Commission) - Children's Rights Workgroup, Texas Children's Commission- Judicial Workgroup on Capacity, Texas Children's Commission- Judicial Equity Workgroup, Texas Children's Commission- Foster Care & Education Judicial Workgroup.

In addition to the numerous child welfare trainings, Judge Mireles is trained in:

- (1) TBRI – Trust-Based Relational Intervention by the Karen Purvis Institute of Child Development with Texas Christian University,
- (2) CSE-IT Tool (Commercial Sexually Exploitation- Identification Tool) by the Governor Abbot's Sex Trafficking Team CSE-IT User Training Course,
- (3) Motivational Interviewing Training for CSEY Responders by Baylor University, and
- (4) Stages of Change in Commercially Sexually Exploited Youth by the Texas Alliance of Child and Family Services Texas Center for Child and Family Studies.

Prior to her judicial appointment in 2015, Judge Mireles served as a member of the Steering Committee for Laredo CASA / Voz De Niños and served as a Panel Chair of the State Bar of Texas Grievance Committee, Region 12. In addition to her legal service, Judge Mireles has been active in her community by serving as an Ad Hoc Committee Member which raised funds to build a new girl scout house to avoid the shutdown of this organization in Laredo. She has volunteered and served as a Service Unit Co-Manager and Daisy Program Level Consultant for the Girl Scouts of Greater South Texas in Laredo and as a girl scout troop leader for 11 years to forty girl scouts. She has also served as a Religious Committee Member for all Girl Scouts and was named by Bishop Tamayo as the Girl Scout Chair of the Catholic Committee on Scouting.

Ms. Eliza Cavazos, M.S. in Criminal Justice; M.S. Agriculture Science.

Ms. Cavazos is the current Executive Director of TEND Court. She had been a Correctional Officer for approximately five years prior to her TEND Court employment. She obtained her undergraduate degree from South Texas College in McAllen, majoring in business management. She also obtained a Master's in Agriculture Science from Texas A&M University -Kingsville and a Master's in Criminal Justice from Texas A&M International University. She has a passion for working with low socio-economic and at-risk populations and families. The latter especially came about working as a Parent Liaison for Gaining Early Awareness and Readiness for Undergraduate Programs (GEAR-UP) guiding a cohort of students and families. She learned that in order to get parents to guide their children on thinking past a high school diploma, she had to walk the talk; therefore, she started her college career. Doing so, allowed the cohort of students and their families to trust that the guidance being provided was doable. However, she realized that the cohort she was tasked with helping was dealing with many hurdles such as domestic violence, unable to pay their bills, unable to put food on the table, some parents being incarcerated, some unemployed and having no work experience or skills, and a language barrier. She collaborated with local community programs, provided the families with resources, and provided English classes, and skills such as sewing/crafts, and cooking; consequently, some became entrepreneurs and self-sufficient. Working as a correctional officer encompasses an array of offenders with different socio-economic backgrounds. She understands the dynamics of broken families and is a domestic violence survivor. Prior to her employment as a correctional officer, Ms. Cavazos worked as a Child Protective Services caseworker. Among her tasks for CPS was to determine whether the child was suspected or a confirmed victim of sex/labor trafficking. In addition, she served as a Court Appointed Special Advocate (CASA) for children in foster care, collaborating with Child Protective Services.

Dr. Frances Bernat, Regents Professor, retired, Texas A&M University System; Emerita, Arizona State University.

Dr. Bernat is a retired Regents Professor of Criminal Justice from Texas A&M International University and Emerita from the School of Criminal Justice and Criminology at Arizona State University. She has been overseeing research and evaluation programs pertaining to youth at risk for several decades: including school youth resilience, truancy diversion, sex trafficking, gang resilience education programs, cyberbullying, and criminal law and justice reform. She received her J.D. from SUNY @ Buffalo and has a Ph.D. in Political Science from Washington State University. Her academic background is multidisciplinary; she holds a master's degree in sociology, and her undergraduate degree is in criminal justice. Her scholarship is transdisciplinary and infuses law, politics, criminal justice, and sociology in an analysis of contemporary domestic and international crime problems. She has published 5 books and numerous articles; her edited book on human sex trafficking analyzes research on sex trafficking from a multidisciplinary and multidimensional perspective. She has received a number of academic and community awards for her scholarship, teaching, and community service. She completed the Child Sex Exploitation Identification Tool (CSE-IT) training in 2020.

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EXECUTED and **AGREED** to as of the dates indicate below.

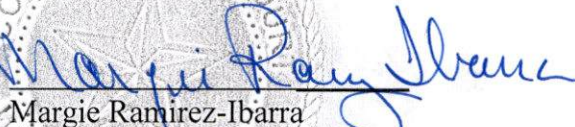
WEBB COUNTY

Date

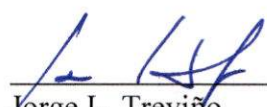

Tano E. Tijerina
Webb County Judge

2/10/25

ATTESTED:


Margie Ramirez-Ibarra
Webb County Clerk

APPROVED AS TO FORM:


Jorge L. Treviño
Assistant General Counsel
Civil Legal Division

The General Counsel, Civil Legal Division's Office may only advise or approve contracts or legal documents on behalf of its clients. It may not advise or approve a contract or legal document on behalf of other parties. Our review of this document was conducted solely from the legal perspective of our client. Our approval of this document was offered solely for the benefit of our client. Other parties should not rely on this approval, and should seek review and approval of their own respective attorney(s).

Passed and approved by the Webb County Commissioners Court
On Feb 10th 2025 item No. 10g