

Letterhead

[Date]

The Honorable Terry M. Wilson
Texas House of Representatives – District 20
P.O. Box 12910
Austin, TX 78711-2910

Dear Representative Wilson:

I am writing to share information about mental health and crisis services available to Williamson County residents and their critical role in supporting **public safety, law enforcement efficiency, and effective community-based care**. These programs ensure that individuals experiencing mental health crises receive timely, appropriate services while **reducing unnecessary incarceration and emergency room utilization**.

We respectfully urge your continued support to sustain and expand the critical resources and programs operated by **Bluebonnet Trails Community Services (BTCS)**, the Texas Health and Human Services Commission-designated Local Mental Health Authority for our region.

Georgetown Diversion Center – Wilco Cash Investment - \$969,264 + In-kind support - \$261,672 = \$1,230,936 annual support

BTCS operates a Diversion Center in Georgetown that provides voluntary and involuntary **crisis stabilization for adults**, with lengths of stay up to 48 hours. The center offers law enforcement officers a safe, local alternative to jail or emergency rooms, allowing individuals in crisis to receive immediate clinical assessment and stabilization while enabling officers to return quickly to their public safety duties.

Data is systematically collected to ensure cost effectiveness, and local cost avoidance estimates indicate the program generated **\$883,455 in savings over the past six months alone**. Based on a \$485,000 County investment, these avoided jail and system costs resulted in a **net savings of \$398,455**, representing an **approximately 82 percent return on investment**, or **about \$1.82 in savings for every \$1 invested**.

Adult Crisis Respite Unit – Wilco In-kind support \$227,400

The 16-bed Crisis Respite Unit (CRU) – currently transitioning from Georgetown to Round Rock – provides voluntary, 24/7 residential care for adults experiencing low-acuity crises. The CRU serves individuals stepping down from the Diversion Center, jail, or inpatient hospitals, and also acts as an **early intervention option** for adults needing support before a crisis escalates.

Youth Therapeutic Respite Unit – Wilco investment for start-up - \$8,145,840

BTCS also operates a 16-bed unit for children and adolescents ages 5 – 17. This program provides short-term, wrap-around care for up to 14 days, with a focus on **family stabilization and reunification**. Over the last 18 months, the Youth Therapeutic Respite Program has demonstrated **\$3,233,189 in cost avoidance** associated with reduced use of inpatient psychiatric care, residential treatment, child welfare placements and juvenile justice involvement.

Jail-Based Competency Restoration Program – Approximately \$850K cost for medications

Through a specialized unit within the Williamson County Jail, adults identified as incompetent to stand trial are provided medications, counseling and education focused on restoration. On

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average this is accomplished in 40 days resulting in significant cost avoidance when average wait time to transfer to the state hospital is approximately 220 days. Restoring in the jail and avoiding state hospital admission has saved the state over \$2 million dollars.

Outcomes

As illustrated in the FY 2025 Williamson County Databook, these programs demonstrated the following key outcomes last year:

- The Diversion Center **served 1,170 adults, stepping 65% down into the community** upon discharge, avoiding jail, inpatient hospitalization and emergency room utilization.
- The average law enforcement **drop-off time was less than 15 minutes**, allowing law enforcement to return to their core public safety responsibilities in the community.
- **Eight percent of Crisis Respite Unit referrals came from the local jail**, including those who successfully completed Jail-Based Competency Restoration Programming.

Notably, despite a **57% increase in county population**—from 426,568 in 2010 to more than 727,000 by 2024 – the county jail has maintained a largely flat average daily census of roughly 600–700 inmates. This contrasts with trends across Texas and similar sized, fast-growing counties, where jail populations have increased since 2021. This is attributed to Williamson County’s long-standing investment in diversion strategies of well over \$1million annually, that safely redirect individuals from incarceration into treatment and community-based services.

Additional Resources are Needed for Vital Community Services

Despite strong local government support, **state contract and grant funding levels remain insufficient** to fully cover the operating costs of the Diversion Center and Crisis Respite services. At the same time, rapid population growth, increasing service demand, and rising workforce costs place strain on outpatient mental health programs. For example, between 2016 and 2026, **case manager salaries increased by 43%**, and the number of individuals served grew by **24%**, while corresponding HHSC funding increased by only **17%**. The above investments as well as ongoing outpatient clinic capacity to serve the expanding population have resulted in \$6.5 million funding gap annually for services.

As demand for mental health services continues to grow, **sustained and increased funding is essential to maintain these proven programs and expand their reach**. Continued support for BTCS represents an investment in **safer communities, more effective use of taxpayer dollars**, and **compassionate, evidence-based care** for Texans in need.

Thank you for your leadership and consideration. I respectfully ask that you support increased funding for BTCS so these critical programs can continue to serve our community effectively.

Sincerely,

[Name]

[Title]

[County / Office]