



Judge Bill Gravell, Jr.

Williamson County Judge

710 Main Street, Georgetown, TX 78626

512.943.1550

ctyjudge@wilcotx.gov

November 26, 2024

Erika Fountain, Ph.D.
Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention
US Department of Justice

Re: Second Program Period Extension
15PJDP-21-GG-04528-COAP

Dear Dr. Fountain,

Williamson County is grateful for the support that the Department of Justice has provided to our Family Recovery Court (FRC) program, thus far. We firmly believe that this has helped us through the initial stages of designing and launching a program that is beneficial to parents and children involved in the child welfare system, and that we hope will be able to replicate in other jurisdictions. Please accept this letter as our request for a second Program Period Extension.

I. Background on Request

The Williamson County Family Recovery Court is funded by a DOJ grant to serve parents involved in child welfare matters. The FRC has two primary objectives: (1) to admit 10 family participants on a rolling basis and, (2) to successfully discharge 8 family participants each year on a rolling basis.

The 3-year grant began in October of 2021 and was due to end in September of 2024. As a result of issues discussed below, we submitted a no-cost extension for an additional 12 months (GAM 0578765), which runs through September 30, 2025, the current program period. This letter represents a request to extend the grant through September 30, 2026.

II. The First Extension

We began using grant funds in October of 2021, but due to various issues, including a challenge in hiring the Program Manager position and a reduction in the number of Child Welfare Referrals in 2021 and 2022 due to both the COVID Pandemic and a change in CPS' approach to child welfare, there was a significant delay in both program development and grant fund utilization. We are currently in the first 2 months of the extension and so, while we are not able to explain the outcome of the extension, below we articulate the intended impact.

Effect on Participants

Through the first two years of the grant a change in the number of filed child welfare cases resulted in a total of 15 participants, prompting our request for the first extension. In year 3 of the grant, an additional 6 participants were admitted, and we are now at the projected census of 10 participants, with 4 currently on the waiting list for admission.



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This change reflects the impact of the grant: the technical assistance that we have received through the Center for Children and Families has been instructive and supportive. After meeting with our TA provider and discussing the low referral numbers, we re-developed our admission screening process such that we are now screening 100% of the child welfare cases filed instead of waiting for referrals. As a result, we saw our number of cases screened go from 45 in year 1 to 102 in year 3 and, in the first month of year 4, 19 cases have been screened.

Through year 3, we have graduated 6 participants. In this first extension period, we project graduating 4 in the first half of 2025 alone and will fill those spots from our waiting list that has resulted from our new screening process.

Effect on Program Development

Prior to onboarding the Case Manager, managing the day-to-day operations of the FRC was the responsibility of the Director of District Court Administration and the District Judge. With the work of our Program Case Manager, we have been able to increase both our impact on participants and our partnerships to provide the services that are so clearly needed.

During the first extension period we project onboarding additional partners, obtaining program evaluation data from our research partner (Univ. of Tx. Arlington) and using that data to inform adjustments to program structure and process. Additionally, we believe that in this first extension, we will be able to build a solid foundation for program sustainability, which will chart major activities in the requested second extension.

III. The Current (Second) Extension Request

At the same time as positive momentum has been achieved, major statewide changes in the child welfare landscape have continued to affect our progress.¹ In the past 2 years, we have had 7 caseworkers assigned to the program from Child Protective Services. The County Attorney's Office, which represents the state in these matters, has continued to experience significant turnover, and the roster of attorneys willing to take child welfare cases is much reduced. All of this affects the progress of cases in the child welfare system as a whole and FRC cases in particular; at the same time, we are proud of our partners who are working to develop and set a path for sustainability for the model that we are developing.

Goals for Second Extension

In year 5 of the grant (FY26), we hope to continue the positive progress of FY2025, including significant revisions to program participant guides, resource guides, program policies and procedures, and a final program assessment, which we anticipate will culminate in a White Paper that will describe what we have done to establish and build a pattern of success with the Family Recovery Court. Finally, the major

¹ See, e.g., Dey, Sneha. "Across Texas a Slow and Sputtered Rollout of Foster Care Privatization." The Texas Tribune, May 31, 2023. Last accessed 11/5/2024 at <https://www.texastribune.org/2023/05/31/texas-department-family-protective-services-foster-care/>.



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goal for Y5 would be to put into place a structure to sustain the Family Recovery Court at the conclusion of this grant. Because of the County's budget requirements, our intent is to have this in place no later than March of 2026, so that it is a part of the FY27 budget discussion as needed.

IV. Balance Information

As of this date, we have drawn down \$231,118.34 and there is an unobligated balance of \$665,826.66 for this grant.

V. Effect of Denial

I am advised by the District Judge who is presiding over the Family Recovery Court that long-term sustainability planning is a key part of the current Fiscal Year and the proposed final 12-month extension. It is highly unlikely that such sustained funding beyond the grant will be in place by September 30, 2025, as such, it is our sincere hope that you will decide favorably on our request. Failing that, however, I expect the District Judge to request that the Commissioners Court consider funding the program beginning in FY2026 (effective October 1, 2025). Should the Court decline to fund the request, and in the absence of non-grant funding, the Family Recovery Court will likely have to cease operations.

VI. Conclusion

We are grateful for this partnership, and what it has allowed us to accomplish in support of children and families in Williamson County. The grant funding has allowed us to employ a full-time case manager, has funded 840 nights of sober living, participation by 10 participants in trauma therapy, and 8 participants in parent education and parent coaching. Most importantly, it has had a positive impact on the 9 children of our successful participants and the potential for a similar impact on the 11 children of our current participants. Thank you for your consideration of our request to extend the time of this grant.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'Bill Gravell', is positioned above a horizontal blue line.

Bill Gravell (Nov 26, 2024 11:57 CST)

Bill Gravell, Jr.

Williamson County Judge

Cc: Hon. Ryan Larson, Judge, 395th Judicial District Court
Hon. Julie Kiley, Williamson County Auditor
Ronald S. Morgan, Jr., Director, District Court Administration