

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

CONTACT: Jon Weizenbaum

(512) 463-0360

June 14, 2000

Senate Committee Prioritizes Proposals to Protect Young and Older Texans

AUSTIN -- Working Texans who daily entrust the care of young children or elderly parents to others deserve to know that their loved ones are safe. The Senate Committee on Human Services, chaired by Sen. Judith Zaffirini, D-Laredo, today (Wednesday) adopted 69 recommendations, most of which address child abuse prevention and long term care for the elderly and persons with disabilities.

"Our priority must be to safeguard most vulnerable citizens," Sen. Zaffirini said. "We must not allow a single senior, young or disabled Texan to be abused or neglected or to suffer needlessly."

The 77th Legislature will consider the 69 Human Services Committee proposals when it convenes in 2001. The proposals include expanding background checks for employees at long-term care facilities, creating a fund to support local efforts to improve access to long-term care services, establishing scholarships to train long-term care nursing staff, and increasing funding for nursing home reimbursement and home and community based services.

Addressing the health needs of the elderly, the committee will ask the Legislature to expand preventive dental services for nursing home residents and improve the coordination of services to persons with Alzheimer's Disease and their families.

To safeguard Texas children the committee adopted resolutions to better coordinate services for children ages zero to three, develop programs to prevent Shaken Baby Syndrome and Sudden Infant Death Syndrome, and increase funding for child care for working families. Other child-related recommendations would increase financial support for families that adopt special needs children; improve planning to reduce unnecessary institutionalization of children; and enable more families of disabled children to receive Medicaid coverage.

The committee also adopted welfare reform recommendations to simplify the application process for Medicaid, welfare and food stamps services. Another proposal aims to help the neediest welfare clients overcome barriers to self-sufficiency.

If the Legislature adopts the committee's recommendations, health coverage and other support for persons leaving welfare for work will be extended, as will Medicaid services to young adults aging out of the foster care system.

