

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

GRANT SUBMISSION to:

**Office of the Governor, Public Safety Office Funding Announcement:
County Innovations to Address Commercial Sexual Exploitation
[SF-CSEP_Announce_PY24](#)**

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
Webb County Justice Center**

**Start date: October 1, 2023
End date: September 30, 2024**

Amount requested: \$250,000

Abstract:

The proposed grant is for a Texas Emergency Network Diversion (TEND) Court program in Webb County to identify and provide services to youth aged 10 to 17 and, who are at risk of sexual exploitation in the 4th Administrative Judicial Regions Child Protection Court of Judge Selina Mireles. Overseen by an Executive Director, the TEND Court program has received two years of funding; its first year was funded in 2021-2022 and has started its second year of grant funding in 2022-2023. This proposed third-year grant is seeking to renew and expand this innovative court diversion program for another year (2023-2024). Judge Mireles and the Executive Director of TEND Court will collaborate with relevant child protective services and counseling providers in Webb County overseen by Judge Mireles. 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 victims and potential victims of sex trafficking and provide prevention and healing trauma-informed care services. The program follows a youth empowerment approach in assisting youth set goals. To assess the effectiveness of TEND Court, a research evaluation will be performed by faculty from Texas A&M International University. TEND Court fills community foster care gaps in order to identify, protect, and prevent child sexual exploitation (CSE) with trauma-informed services so as to provide justice for sex trafficking victims in Laredo/ Webb County.

A request was made to OOG to change the grant's original name from the "Trafficking" Emergency Network Diversion (TEND) Court program to the "Texas" Emergency Network Diversion (TEND) Court program. Approval was granted and advised to include the change in this grant proposal.

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 proposed in February 2021. That proposed program, the Texas Emergency Network Diversion Court program has been funded in the last two Texas Governor's Grant cycles (2021-2022 & 2022-2023). Operating out of Judge Selina Mireles' Child Protection Court (4th and 5th Administrative Judicial Region), the diversion court program addresses the needs of children at risk of sexual exploitation. 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 a third year of operation. At the time of this proposal's submission, TEND Court is in the process of identifying youth in the Child Protection Court in need of diversion services.

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 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."³ 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.⁴ Since 2007, the National Human Trafficking Hotline had 6,877 cases; of these 987 cases of human trafficking were reported in 2020.⁵ 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 2020.⁶ 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.⁷

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.

³ 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>

⁴ Texas Penal Code, Title 5, Sec 20A. <https://statutes.capitol.texas.gov/Docs/PE/htm/PE.20A.htm>

⁵ Human Trafficking Hotline. <https://humantraffickinghotline.org/state/texas>

⁶ 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/Data_Book/Child_Protective_Investigations/Investigations/Types_of_Abuse.asp

⁷ Lighthouse Report, 2021. file:///C:/Users/Fran%20B/Downloads/LighthouseReport%20-%20risk%20prevalence%20(1).pdf

Laredo, located in South Texas Webb County, is the largest inland port along the Mexican border with about 262,000 residents. The FBI's Uniform Crime Reports⁸ indicated that there were 67 arrests for human trafficking in Webb County in 2019; in 2019, the District Attorney's office processed 27 cases for prostitution. Problematically, the Lighthouse CSE-IT⁹ 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.¹⁰ 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. The TEND Court Executive Director is presently re-screening these reported cases using the CSE-IT to make sure that the screening of the youth is current and up-to-date so that appropriate services can be extended to them. She will continue to screen Child Protection Court files to identify youth appearing in the Child Protection Court using the CSE-IT.

To address the needs of 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 in Child Protection Court who are, or are likely to be, victims of sex trafficking. TEND Court will divert youth aged 10 to 17 who are facing commercial sexual exploitation away from the criminal justice and juvenile justice system involvement. TEND Court will coordinate and collaborate with relevant agencies and social service providers social service, educational, and counseling diversion programs from a trauma-informed, victim-centered approach. TEND Court will fill the gaps in the institutional systems of responding to youth at risk of commercial 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 and in the United States. Two commercial sexual exploitation diversion court programs in the state focus on adults in the criminal justice system and one works with youth in the juvenile justice system who have been charged with criminal offenses or delinquency. This diversion 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,

⁸Crime in Texas Online, <http://txucr.nibrs.com> (then click on Webb County in the interactive map).

⁹ 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)

¹⁰ 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.

safety, security, and help. If not helped then child victims will suffer life-long PTSD, substance addictions, homelessness, engage in minor criminal offenses that include prostitution, may be runaways or throw-aways, experience teen-dating violence, and may be suicidal. They also tend to be involved in the justice system, and child protection services, and/or are in a residential placement.¹¹ 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 exploited sexually.¹² Problematically, as the House of Representatives hearing reported in 2018, victims are hidden in plain sight.¹³ Victims do not come forward to report their abuse; they may have problems trusting medical and mental health professionals, and law enforcement officers and may want to protect their family members who have hurt or exploited them.¹⁴ 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.¹⁵

Most victims in the United States are domestic youth who at young ages are sexually exploited. In 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. More recently, two teenage girls were found unconscious on a plane at the Laredo airport and rushed to a local hospital.¹⁶ These girls were drugged and could have been victims of trafficking.

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).¹⁷ Many victims who were sexually exploited and/or abused as youth continue as young adults to sell their bodies; these victims also face physical, sexual,

¹¹ 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>

¹² 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.

¹³ 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)

¹⁴ Hurst, T.E., (2019).

¹⁵ 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.

¹⁶ 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/>

¹⁷ Clayton et al., (2013).

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.¹⁸ 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.¹⁹

Addressing the needs of minor victims from a trauma-informed approach is essential to thwart continued victimization and begin the healing process.²⁰ 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. 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.²¹ 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. International 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.

A localized South Texas response is critical to breaking the cycle of violence, manipulation, and abuse.²² 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.²³ 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

¹⁸ 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.

¹⁹ Clayton et al., (2013).

²⁰ Gerassi, L.B. & Nichols, A.J. (2018). Sex trafficking and commercial sexual exploitation: Prevention, advocacy, and trauma-informed practice. NY, NY: Springer Pub.

²¹ Amara Legal Center. (2018). Survey of United States diversion programs: Sex work and sex trafficking. [survey-of-united-states-diversion-programs.pdf](#)

²² Bernat, F.P. & Winkeller, H.C. (2010). Human sex trafficking: The global become local. *Women & Criminal Justice* 20(1-2): 186-192.

²³ Bernat & Winkeller, (2010); Walsh, (2016).

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.²⁴ An emergency networked response to sex trafficking is needed in South Texas.

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 diversion court program overseen by Judge Selina Mireles in her Child Protection Court, 4th Judicial Region, located in Laredo/ Webb County, Texas. TEND Court is a collaborative model that 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.: Serving Children and Adults in Need²⁵, the Child Advocacy Center of Laredo- Webb County²⁶ and, legal counsel Mrs. Michele Nigliazzo²⁷). TEND Court will use the CSE-IT tool to identify potential and clear cases of sexual exploitation during the grant period. Judge Mireles' Child Protective Services Court will hold a specialty diversion court to oversee the diversion of the youth into diversion trauma-informed social and mental health services as well as any medical or educational services needed to assist victims.

At present, sex 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 sex trafficked minors by providing them with appropriate social, educational, medical, and mental health services in addition to educational and family support assistance. TEND Court opens a new 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 part of a new initiative, the Texas Emergency Network Diversion (TEND) which will unfold additional parts of the 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), TEND Court will bring a coordinated response to the problem of sex trafficking in South Texas. TEND Court's mission is "To protect youth and young adults from sex trafficking in South Texas and inspire change in their lives by having a network that provides advocacy, emergency support services, and a cohesive response to the needs of sex trafficked victims".

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

²⁴ Representative Wagner, A., & McCann, R.W., (2017).

²⁵ SCAN – Serving Children and Adults in Need. <https://www.scan-inc.org/>

²⁶ Child Advocacy Center of Laredo- Webb County. <http://www.caclaredo.org/>

²⁷ Ms. Martha Cigarroa, <https://www.legaldirectories.com/Martha-L-Cigarroa-19204-Atty.aspx>

Ms. Michele Nigliazzo,

https://www.texasbar.com/AM/Template.cfm?Section=Find_A_Lawyer&template=/Customsource/MemberDirectory/MemberDirectoryDetail.cfm&ContactID=352681 .

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 diversion court program. Sex trafficking diversion 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.²⁸ We know that some youths 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 also get referrals from Child Protective Services for youth who are not justice-system involved. TEND Court uses the Child Protection Court as a point of contact to identify and respond to the needs of commercially exploited youth who may or may not be involved in the justice system. TENDING to youth 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.

In sum, this program creates a network of legal, social services, non-profit, and academic support programs and services designed to identify minors who might be exploited and assist them with counseling and social services (e.g., trust-based counseling, animal therapy, mentoring, summer camps, foster care, 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 “catch” minors who have risk factors associated with trafficking before they are sexually exploited. TEND Court also aims to identify minors who are commercially exploited and who need help to escape their exploitation and sexual slavery.

Program and diversion services information

TEND Court will have direct oversight in Judge Mireles’ Child Protection Court for the grant period October 1, 2023, through September 31, 2024. 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 (TEND Court Executive Director is 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 victim service providers to determine what services are necessary to respond to the multiple traumas and the immediate service needs of the victim of trafficking. It is estimated that over the year of the grant about 24 to 40 youths will be in need of services either because of clear or potential concern for sex exploitation. Referrals to TEND will most likely come from two sources: Child Protective Services (DFPS) and/or the TEND Court (self-referral from the court’s caseload). Other referrals may come to TEND Court from law enforcement or other social service agencies (e.g., CSEY Advocate or CASA advocate). Referrals will be ongoing throughout the grant period.

²⁸ 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/>

Once or twice per month, Judge Mireles will convene a sex trafficking specialty court. Judge Mireles will oversee those individuals who are between the ages of ten and seventeen and may 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 docket to ensure that victims or potential victims are identified and assisted. Youth who appear in the Child Protective Court may have the assistance of the Child Advocacy Center, PILLAR, and/or SCAN. 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 (SCAN, PILLAR, CASA) or with a private counselor may also be done. In addition, Emergency Movement Desensitization and Reprocessing (EMDR) and Response to Intervention (RTI) 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.²⁹

TEND Court is committed to assisting in the collection of data to be shared and knowledge gained through TEND Court. If appropriate, the data reports can be shared within the State's Human Trafficking Fusion Center³⁰ (sharing effective tools for investigations and prosecutions) and the State's Lighthouse³¹ data software collection. Judge Mireles and the TEND Executive Director will also ensure that the victims have assigned legal counsel to represent them and work with university researchers in the collection of data from the diversion courts and diversion service programs. In addition, Judge Mireles and the Executive Director 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. Research Triangle Institute (RTI) International is a nonprofit that has a new evaluation tool to track the progress of human trafficking victims.³² The TEND Executive Director will make use of this National Institute of Justice (NIJ) free tool to ensure that outcomes are being tracked as minors progress through the court process and engage in the services provided.

²⁹ 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>

³⁰ Human Trafficking Fusion Center. <https://htfusion.org/>

³¹ Lighthouse. <https://htfusion.org/>

³² RTI International. (September 24, 2020). *New Tool Supports Efforts to Help Survivors of Human Trafficking*. RTI International. <https://www.rti.org/announcements/new-tool-supports-efforts-help-survivors-human-trafficking>

Texas A&M International University (TAMIU) faculty, Dr. Frances Bernat, will assist the TEND Court in data analysis. The analysis 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 prepared for the Texas State Governor's Office to evaluate the program's effectiveness and the program services delivered.

Target population: Who will be served?

TEND Court will provide diversion services to minors (aged 10 to 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 a child protective services referral. However, minors may be identified within the Child Protection Court's own caseload. In addition, TEND Court may have referrals from the Child Advocacy Center (CAC), CSEY Advocates, law enforcement, and other service providers who work with youth. We expect between 24 and 40 youths will be serviced in this program; they will be voluntarily asked to participate in a variety of educational and empowerment activities and will be assigned counseling and medical services in accordance with Child Protection Court procedures and policies.

Performance management

The TEND Executive Director will oversee the diversion court 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 sexual exploitation. Once identified, the TEND Executive Director will coordinate a response that is trauma-informed. The objective is to identify children who are being trafficked or at risk of being sex trafficked 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. At the end of each quarter, the TEND Executive Director will assess each youth in the program to determine the efficacy of the services provided.

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. Data analysis will be in the aggregate to determine if TEND Court is effective at identifying and providing diversion and services to victims and potential victims of sex trafficking through this innovative diversion court. Dr. Bernat was a Principal Investigator of truancy diversion programs and youth resilience research programs. She is a skilled qualitative and quantitative research design analyst and will set up a data management system that will track individual victims and the services provided in accordance with ethical social science research protocols that maintain victim and provider confidentiality while tracking the efficacy of services and identification protocols. Data analysis will be performed regularly 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. The aim of the research is not just to report the functioning of TEND Court but to provide

meaningful policy and program delivery analysis that might be replicated in other counties within Texas. 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 diversion court program have (or will have) Trauma - Based Relational Intervention (TBRI)³³ training and/or CSE-IT training. TEND personnel includes Judge Mireles and the TEND Executive Director Ms. Eliza Cavazos, Attorney Ad Litem Mrs. Michele Nigliazzo, and related service providers (e.g., Child Protective Services, Child Advocacy Center, PILLAR, SCAN, and Casa de Misericordia – a domestic violence shelter). We know that victims may not want to engage in services or say that they are being sex trafficked. 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.

1. Training and travel: The personnel already have completed CSE-IT and TBRI training. Other training on human trafficking and sexual exploitation of youth will occur as 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 statewide. Discussions with other sex trafficking diversion court judges may also take place during the grant period.
2. Development of reliable and valid data collection tools: Data collection tools used in the program assessment and evaluation research will be conducted on SurveyMonkey to record demographic and case management information on the youth served. An initial CSE-IT assessment will occur upon referral. If a minor is assigned to the TEND Court, then reassessments will thereafter occur in three-month intervals and, a final evaluation will occur at the end of the grant in September 2023. Data on the youth's demographic characteristics, CSE-IT score, risk factors for exploitation, and services provided will be collected and assessed. Outcome measures will be provided in quarterly reports to indicate: the referral agency; whether commercial sex exploitation is confirmed, suspected, or not confirmed; the referral agency's CSE-IT score; the TEND Court CSE-IT scores (both at intake, and at 90-day intervals thereafter); TEND services (e.g., advocate assignment, therapy services provided); and whether a positive or negative exit from TEND Court occurred.
3. Service delivery. 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 the 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 services provided by the TEND Executive Director include training sessions, educational sessions, and community activities and ensure that the minors have a safe, inclusive, non-discriminatory, culturally competent, and healthy learning environment. When their case comes to the TEND Court Judge, she is sensitive and caring and ensures that the minor's best interests are protected. Each minor in the TEND Court program is provided a legal advocate if necessary and is provided time to work with the TEND Executive Director while attending the preventive CSEC sessions, as they may

³³ Karyn Purvis institute. Trust- Based Relational Intervention. Texas State University. <https://child.tcu.edu/about-us/tbri/#sthash.lfO4mEBy.dpbs>

share their feelings, needs, and hopes for a better future. In addition, 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.

4. Culturally Specific and Underserved Populations: Underserved populations mean populations who face barriers in accessing and using victim services, and include populations underserved because of geographic location, religion, sexual orientation, gender identity, underserved racial and ethnic populations, populations underserved because of 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, as appropriate.- 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 services Hispanic minor males and females who may be or are at risk of sexual exploitation. 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.

5. Once youth are identified as a clear or possible concern, then the TEND Court Executive Director will discuss diversion system options that enable a victim-centered, trauma-informed approach with Judge Mireles and the Child Protection Court service providers. All services utilized by victims will be voluntary, not coerced.
 - 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. Diversion legal/court services might include, but are not limited to:
 1. Legal representation
 2. Child Protection Court and/or Child Advocacy Center services for emergency housing, conservator placements, etc.
 3. Bilingual court services with an English/Spanish-certified language translator.

- ii. Diversion treatment services may include, but are not limited to:
 - 1. Risk assessment for commercial sex exploitation. The TEND Executive Director will perform this, and work with the courts and other service providers to determine whether someone is being sex trafficked 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.
 - 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. Group counseling by a private counselor to provide cognitive and behavior group therapy for a group of three to five minors for 90-minute sessions. If necessary, the private counselor might need to have individual counseling with a minor when appropriate to assist the minor develop coping skills.
 - 8. 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, over a 10- week period, to engage minors in empowerment activities that will enable them to develop goals for their future and find a pathway toward success.
 - 9. 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.
 - 10. 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.
 - 11. Summer educational camps for youth (summer 2023). The TEND Executive Director will provide youth with educational opportunities during the summer.
 - 12. Equine or dog therapy – Cuidado de Animales (Tending Animals). Pet therapy has been shown to be effective with persons who experience

trauma. We currently do not have a dog or equine therapy component in the TEND Court but want to expand service providers in year two. 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.

13. Medical services if necessary to assist youth with their physical health (e.g., bruises, pregnancy, etc.).
14. 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.

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.”³⁴ TEND Court aims to help the State of Texas achieve its mission in South Texas by creating a diversion 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 experiences³⁵, they are afraid to report their victimization because they may be afraid of their trafficker and law enforcement³⁶, they may have bonded with their trafficker³⁷, they may not know that they are victimized, they may not know whom to

³⁴ Office of the Texas Governor, Greg Abbott. Child Sex Trafficking Team.

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

³⁵ 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.

³⁶ 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.

³⁷ Reid, J.A., (2014). Entrapment and enmeshment schemes used by sex traffickers. *Sexual Abuse* 28(6): 491-511. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1079063214544334>.

trust and how to get help³⁸. 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.³⁹ Programs and service providers need to be flexible⁴⁰ and ensure that they enable victims to participate voluntarily.

Sex trafficking diversion 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.⁴¹ 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”.⁴² Successful programs use resilience models and use research designs that look at multiple risk factors.⁴³ Sex trafficking identification and victims’ aftercare once they are identified need accurate documentation of service provision⁴⁴. 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 a program initiative that 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.),⁴⁵ 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.

³⁸ 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.

³⁹ Orme, J. & Ross-Sheriff, F. (2015). Sex trafficking: Polices, 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.

⁴⁰ 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.

⁴¹ Walker-Rodriguez, A. & Hill, R. (2011). Human sex trafficking. *FBI Enforcement Bulletin*. <https://leb.fbi.gov/articles/featured-articles/human-sex-trafficking>.

⁴² 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>.

⁴³ Countryman-Roswurm, K. & Bolin, B.L. (2014).

⁴⁴ 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>

⁴⁵ 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>

- **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):

1. Identify minor victims who are at risk of being sex trafficked.
2. Identify minor victims who are being sex trafficked.
3. Provide individualized trauma-informed care to identified youth.
4. Coordinate identification and trauma-informed care responses among TEND Court, private counsel, and various social service, 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 evaluation of the court diversion program and, the legal, social service, and mental health response to determine the effectiveness of TEND Court.

First and Second Objectives: To identify and provide services for minors who are, or maybe, victims of sex trafficking; all TEND Court program personnel will be trained in CSE-IT to identify victims. We estimate that there will be on average 5 victims of sex trafficking identified each month of the funded grant (serving between 24 and 40 youth during the funding year). Because there are no statistics readily available on the number of victims, this program will help generate reliable data by identifying minors at risk and victims who are exploited. The TEND Executive Director will be responsible for collecting and reporting administrative and case data on a monthly basis to the relevant stakeholders and/or the TAMIU program evaluators. (October 1, 2023, through September 30, 2024).

Third and Fourth Objectives: Each month of the grant, The TEND Executive Director will work with the diversion court judge, Judge Mireles, to ensure that legal, social service, educational, medical, and mental health care providers will provide diversion services and advocacy for each of the victims assigned to the diversion 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 specialty court for trafficking victim diversion, 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 diversion services protocols are followed. As the case diversion proceeds, the TEND Executive Director will ensure that identified minors are appropriately placed in services, that the victim is voluntarily consenting to participate and that all data collected by the coordinator maintains appropriate legal, social service, educational, medical, and mental health confidences. Diversion services will be tailored to the individual victim, it is imperative that the TEND Executive Director maintain accurate monthly logs, and work with relevant stakeholders, such as DFPS, SCAN, PILLAR, and the Child Advocacy Center, to ensure that each individual victim has particularized diversion services offered and completed. As the victim completes diversion, the diversion courts will finalize the court record as

required by law. The TEND Executive Director will ensure that legal representation is provided to these individuals and that the individual receives appropriate diversion 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 diversion services provided. It is not the intent of this program to force participation; the TEND Executive Director will be responsible for ensuring voluntary 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 diversion program can be tracked over the course of the year-long grant and be held in the Court’s secure computer data file. 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 court diversion program to prevent youth from commercial sexual exploitation;
- 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 research evaluation.

TEND Activities and Timeline	Oct	Nov	Dec	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep
Pre-program Research – assess the 2023-2024 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 Diversion Court Program	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
TEND CSEY Advocate	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
TEND - Child Advocacy Center	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 Victim Medical Health Services	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
TEND RTI	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 Research Report			X			X			X			
TEND Service Modification (if needed)				X			X			X		
TEND Training and Travel (as needed)		X	X		X	X		X	X		X	
TEND Final Research Report												X

Capabilities of Persons Directly Involved in TEND 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 diversion 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.

Judge Selina Mireles, Associate Judge, 4th and 5th Administrative 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 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.

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. She is a member of the Laredo-Webb County Bar Association and the Laredo Women’s Bar Association.

Prior to her judicial appointment in 2015, Judge Mireles served as a member of the Steering Committee for Laredo CASA / Voz De Niños and also 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 in order 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 also 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.

Mrs. Michele Nigliazzo, Attorney.

Mrs. Nigliazzo is an experienced trauma-informed attorney who started practice over 25 years ago in the field of intellectual property law. Upon the adoption of her fourth child, who experienced extensive trauma and neglect, Mrs. Nigliazzo realized that traumatized children and teens are at the highest risk for potential victimization. As a result, Mrs. Nigliazzo changed her practice from intellectual property to exclusively handling issues related to children and teens who have suffered trauma, including sexual abuse. Since that time, Mrs. Nigliazzo has been a powerful voice in advocating for traumatized children and teens. In that regard, Mrs. Nigliazzo served on the board of directors of Attach, an international trauma organization. In that capacity, she worked closely with trauma professionals and families providing services to severely traumatized children and teens. Mrs. Nigliazzo was also critical in planning and executing an international conference that gathered hundreds of professionals and caretakers for key training on handling trauma behaviors and obtaining resources. In her capacity as both an attorney and parent to a traumatized child, Mrs. Nigliazzo has spoken at several national conferences including the Foster Family Treatment Association (FFTA) conference, the Association for Training on Trauma and Attachment in Children (ATTACH) conference, and the Court Appointed Special Advocates (CASA) conference. Mrs. Nigliazzo has also served as an advisory board member for Change Academy of the Ozarks (CALO), a residential treatment center for teens who have experienced severe trauma. Currently, Mrs. Nigliazzo serves as Court Advocacy Director for Attachment Trauma Network (ATN), an international organization dedicated to severely traumatized teens and children. In her law practice, Mrs. Nigliazzo continues to serve as Attorney Ad Litem in Laredo, Texas representing foster care children and teens who are often at risk of trafficking. Mrs. Nigliazzo is TBRI trained in motivational interviewing and has a B.S. in Psychology. She is the present attorney representing most of the TEND Court minors.

Dr. Frances Bernat, Regents Professor, Texas A&M International University.

Dr. Bernat is a Regents Professor of Criminal Justice and a member of the emeritus faculty 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, her master's 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 4 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.