

**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 Solutions to Address Commercial Sexual Exploitation FY 2025**

[County Solutions to Address Commercial Sexual Exploitation, FY2025 | eGrants \(texas.gov\)](#)

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, 2024
End date: September 30, 2025**

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 through 22 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 three years of funding; its first year was funded in 2021-2022 and the program has been refunded twice (2022-2024). This proposed fourth year grant is seeking to renew and expand this innovative court diversion program for another year (2024-2025). 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. 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.

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. That proposed program, the Texas Emergency Network Diversion Court program has been funded in the last three Texas Governor's Grant cycles (2021-2024). 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 fourth 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 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 Texas is the first state to enact a law that makes buying sex from a victim a felony offense.⁵ Since 2007, the National Human Trafficking Hotline had 6,877 cases; of these 987 cases of human trafficking were reported in 2020.⁶ 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.⁷ 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 2020.⁸ Webb County, by year-end 2021, had a child sex trafficking risk score of 2.95 (the third highest

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

⁶ Human Trafficking Hotline. <https://humantraffickinghotline.org/state/texas>

⁷ Ken Paxton, Attorney General of Texas, <https://www.texasattorneygeneral.gov/human-trafficking-section/what-human-trafficking/sex-trafficking-texas> .

⁸ 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

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.⁹

Laredo, located in South Texas Webb County, is the largest inland port along the Mexican border with about 250,000 residents. The FBI's Uniform Crime Reports¹⁰ 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-IT¹¹ website indicated that youth are exploited for at least two years before 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 youths in Webb County, we could have 42 cases of sex trafficking concern among cases serviced singularly by juvenile justice personnel in Webb County.¹² 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.

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 and young adults in Child Protection Court who are, or are likely to be, victims of exploitation including sex trafficking. TEND Court will divert youth aged 10 through 22 who are facing exploitation, including 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 age groups 18 through 22, who opt to continue foster care services as they transition to independence and who were in TEND as a youth. TEND Court will coordinate and collaborate with relevant agencies: social service providers, educational, and counseling diversion programs from a trauma-informed victim-centered approach. TEND Court led the way in diverting persons 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 including the commercial sexual exploitation of children. 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. The TEND Court is in a Child Protection Court in South Texas.

⁹ Lighthouse Report, 2021. file:///C:/Users/Fran%20B/Downloads/LighthouseReport%20-%20risk%20prevalence%20(1).pdf

¹⁰ Crime in Texas Online, <http://txucr.nibrs.com> (then click on Webb County in the interactive map).

¹¹ 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)

¹² 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.

Who is at risk of commercial sexual exploitation?

The victims of exploitation, and sex trafficking are exploited by family, kinship, friends, or strangers who prey on vulnerable youth and young adults; if exploited by family, kinship, or friends then the victims may have difficulty breaking free from their exploitation. Victims of exploitation, including 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 PTSD, substance addictions and homelessness, engage in minor criminal offenses that include prostitution, may be runaways or throwaway children, experience teen-dating violence, and may be suffering with suicidal ideations. They also tend to be involved in the justice system, and have welfare agency history, and/or are in a residential treatment placement.¹³ 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.¹⁴ Problematically, as the House of Representatives hearing reported in 2018, victims are hidden in plain sight.¹⁵ Victims do not come forward to report their abuse; they may have problems trusting any adult including, CPS case workers, family members, kinship, teachers, medical and mental health professionals and, law enforcement officers.¹⁶ 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 situations they live daily. In addition, 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.¹⁷

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

¹³ 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>

¹⁴ 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.

¹⁵ 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)

¹⁶ Hurst, T.E., (2019).

¹⁷ 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.

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.¹⁸ 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.¹⁹ Among TEND Court youth who have been serviced, several have self-identified as being exploited, or trafficked to another country, locally, and taken to different cities. The TEND Court Judge Mireles, and Executive Director facilitated service providers for the TEND Court youth's specific services needed. The TEND Court also teaches positive and proactive self-advocacy and encourages the TEND Court youth to do so during the TEND Court. Consequently, the TEND Court's assistance and helping the youth to curb their abuse and tending to their needs for housing, education, and other diversion court provisions allow the clients to continue moving forward while implementing positive coping skills daily.

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).²⁰ 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, 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.²¹ 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.²² TEND Court is a CPS court that can have extended jurisdiction over persons aged 18 through 22 if they were in foster care and may voluntarily decide to continue to receive services. If a request is made from age group 18 through 22 ***who was not part of the TEND Court as a minor***, the TEND Court Judge will review the individual's request following the TEND Court provisions.

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.²³ 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. Service providers must understand the importance of being mindful that the avenues that ensnare victims are inter-connected, intergenerational 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 them. Young adult victims require services to help them as they transition from foster care to independence. Across the United States,

¹⁸ 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/>

¹⁹ 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>

²⁰ Clayton et al., (2013).

²¹ 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.

²² Clayton et al., (2013).

²³ Gerassi, L.B. & Nichols, A.J. (2018). Sex trafficking and commercial sexual exploitation: Prevention, advocacy, and trauma-informed practice. NY, NY: Springer Pub.

some diversion court programs usually involve the juvenile justice and criminal justice system by identifying youth and young adults who are engaged in prostitution exploitation.²⁴ 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, are facing financial hardships, 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 is 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; however, they will require life-long counseling services, housing assistance, and, health care services.

A localized South Texas response is critical to breaking the cycle of violence, manipulation, and abuse.²⁵ The local response must be victim-centered and must consider the multiple traumas of exploitation, especially 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.²⁶ 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 exploitation including 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.²⁷ An emergency networked response is needed to address exploitation and commercial sex trafficking 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 specialty court program 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.: the Child Advocacy Center of Laredo- Webb County,

²⁴ Amara Legal Center. (2018). Survey of United States diversion programs: Sex work and sex trafficking. [survey-of-united-states-diversion-programs.pdf](#)

²⁵ Bernat, F.P. & Winkeller, H.C. (2010). Human sex trafficking: The global become local. *Women & Criminal Justice* 20(1-2): 186-192.

²⁶ Bernat & Winkeller, (2010); Walsh, (2016).

²⁷ Representative Wagner, A., & McCann, R.W., (2017).

Common Thread, PILLAR, SCAN, Communities in School and, and attorney ad litem). TEND Court will use the CSE-IT tool to identify clear and potential cases of exploitation and sexual exploitation during the grant period. In addition, no concern cases will continue to be monitored, as at-risk indicators may shift (e.g., new CPS case, run away, level of care change) resulting in clear or possible concerns. Judge Mireles' Child Protective Services Court will hold a specialty diversion court to oversee the diversion of the TEND Court youth into diversion trauma-informed social and mental health services as well as any medical and/or educational services needed to assist victims. The TEND Court Executive Director will provide the TEND Court youth educational sessions that can enable them to be resilient and engage in self-advocacy. In accordance, with the funded grant, a TEND Court staff will provide regular meetings to ensure coordinated services and adhere to the TEND Court process of service provisions.

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 severe trauma like a sexual assault or a teen brought to a medical center for services as described above. The TEND Court seeks to identify and support clear or potential concerns, and sex trafficked minors by providing them with appropriate social, educational, medical, and mental health services; in this grant cycle. Additionally, the TEND Court seeks to help young adults transitioning from foster care to independence with additional independent living support assistance. TEND Court opens a dynamic choice for exploited 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 that establishes a networked response to exploitation including 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., Trust-Based Relational Intervention (TBRI)). 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".

The proposed grant program is overseen by Judge Selina Mireles in the Webb County Child Protection Court. TEND Court creates a culture of support and engenders the premise that all children need protection from exploitation, especially from commercial sex exploitation, and will be provided legal, medical, mental health, educational, and social services 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

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/>

not be involved in the justice system. 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 exploited and 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, emotional animal therapy, art therapy, music therapy, equine therapy, mentoring, summer camps, foster care, career trajectories, survivor leader peer support, educational liaison, etc.). Children at risk of exploitation including commercial 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 minors in foster care and young adults (with extended CPS care) who have risk factors associated with exploitation and trafficking before they are sexually exploited. TEND Court also aims to identify minors and young adults transitioning from foster care who are exploited and commercially exploited and help them 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 from October 1, 2024, through September 30, 2025. Judge Mireles will employ a person to administer the program and coordinate the identification of exploited including sex-trafficked minors and young adults as the Executive Director of TEND Court. Youth and young adults 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 services depending on the individual needs of the exploited youth. It is estimated that over the year of the grant, 20 to 40 youths will need specific services either because of clear or potential concern for exploitation including commercial exploitation. Referrals to TEND will most likely come from the following two sources: TEND Court (self-referral from the court's caseload) or Child Protective Services (DFPS). Other referrals may come to TEND Court from law enforcement, the juvenile system, or other social service agencies (e.g., Common Thread Advocate or CASA). Referrals will be ongoing throughout the grant period.

Judge Mireles will convene the TEND Court sessions according to the youth's specific needs of concern (e.g.: weekly, biweekly, monthly, etc.). Judge Mireles will oversee those individuals who are between the ages of 10 and 22 who have risk factors for exploitation and 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, among other at-risk indicators). Judge Mireles will maintain a separate docket to ensure that exploited persons and/or persons at risk for commercial exploitation are identified and assisted according to their specific needs. Youth who appear in the Child Protective Court may have the assistance of the Child Advocacy Center, PILLAR, and/or SCAN among other community service providers. 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 [TMC, PMC]). Placement of a minor with a particular counseling agency (SCAN, PILLAR) or with a TEND Court 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. It has been proven that EMDR has been effective for treating persons who experience post-traumatic stress; for use with victims of exploitation, and human trafficking, EMDR is showing promise for addressing complex trauma.²⁹ To serve the TEND Court youth according to their specific needs, counselors who have been trained to work with exploited, human trafficking victims, including children at risk of exploitation will be assigned.

Judge Mireles and the TEND Executive Director will also ensure that the TEND Court youth have assigned legal counsel to represent them in the TEND Court, and diversion service programs. In addition, Judge Mireles and the Executive Director will continue to receive training and attend conferences on exploitation, human trafficking, and commercial exploitation of children. The TEND Court must collaborate and have the collaboration and support from legal and social service advocates, and service providers for the TEND Court youth so they are served accordingly. 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.

TEND Court is committed to assisting in the collection of data to be shared and knowledge gained through. For the past two years, TEND Court had a process evaluation performed by an academic researcher. During this same period, the TEND Court received mentoring support from the National Council of Juvenile and Family Court Judges (NCJFCJ) on how to assist children who were at risk of being exploited including commercially exploited. The preliminary assessment of the process evaluation and the NCJFCJ mentoring is that TEND Court is successful at identifying youth and providing diversion services accordingly. When it has been appropriate, the TEND Court has shared the data reports with the State's Human Trafficking Fusion Center³⁰ (sharing effective tools for investigations and prosecutions) and the State's Lighthouse³¹ data software collection (CSE-IT scores). In addition, the TEND Court will respond to the Office of Governor (OOG) requests for specific evaluation measures 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.

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/>

Target population: Who will be served?

TEND Court will provide diversion 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 exploitation and 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 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. 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. We expect between 20 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 following Child Protection Court procedures and policies. 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 care at the age of 18 or from extended care at age 22. TEND Court wraps around the youth at risk of exploitation 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. Youths will choose when they desire to speak with the judge; the judge will ensure space on her docket as is needed for clients in TEND Court.

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 exploitation and 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 exploited, trafficked, or at risk of being exploited or sex trafficked and provide effective services that are individualized to the client 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 five-part module training using My Life My Choice³² – an evidence-based program designed for girls at risk of exploitation. The TEND Court Executive Director will assess each youth in the program to determine (e.g., when at-risk indicators have increased), the efficacy of the services provided. A second phase of the TEND Court module training will be provided to youth who continue to struggle with implementing positive coping skills and instead exhibit negative behaviors (e.g., anger management, disrespectfulness, challenging authority, alcohol/drug misuse, unhealthy relationships, altercations, among other negative behaviors), with modules that specifically addresses the youth's needs.

³² My Life My Choice, <https://www.mylifemychoice.org/why-it-matters> .

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 the 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 the TEND Court is effective at identifying and providing diversion and services to victims and potential victims of exploitation and sex trafficking through this innovative diversion 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. Data analysis will be performed regularly to ascertain how the 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 the clients. The aim of the process evaluation research is not just to report the functioning of the 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) Trust-Based Relational Intervention (TBRI)³³ training and/or CSE-IT training. TEND personnel includes Judge Mireles and the TEND Executive, Attorney Ad Litem assigned to the youth, and related service providers (e.g., Child Protective Services, Child Advocacy Center, PILLAR, SCAN, BCFS/Common Thread, CASA). 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 or 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 for each TEND Court client.

1. Training and travel: The personnel already have completed CSE-IT and TBRI training. Other training on exploitation, human trafficking, and commercial 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 or outside the state. Discussions with other sex trafficking diversion court judges may also take place during the grant period.
2. Data collection: An initial CSE-IT assessment will occur upon referral. If a minor is assigned to the TEND Court, then reassessments will thereafter occur when at-risk indicators have changed (e.g. new CPS case, run away status, at-risk indicators changed) and, a final evaluation will occur when/if CPS is no longer the Conservatorship (e.g., family reunification, adoption, permanent placement) and youth is no longer part of the TEND Court. 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 how many youth or young

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

adults are in TEND Court and the number of successes or setbacks a youth or young adult experienced (HS graduation, job placement, not running away, drug or alcohol misuse, 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 modules, completing modules, asking for help, positively advocating for themselves, attending counseling services, implementing coping skills, attending school, better grades, recognizing risks, and ameliorating them, among other successes) will be identified.

3. Service delivery by select personnel. TEND Court is culturally competent when providing services to clients. The Texas Emergency Network Diversion (TEND) Court program employs culturally competent victim services with sensitivity for the clients. 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 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.

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 and commercial exploitation 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 is on hand at the end of the TEND Court module sessions to ensure that if a youth has a “triggered reaction” to a session, she or he can get immediate assistance. The 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) experiences. If a youth or young adult are trafficking victims then a survivor leader will be assigned to the youth/young adult so that she or he will have a mentor from a trafficked Survivor Leader. A second phase of the TEND Court module training will be provided to youth who continue to struggle with implementing positive coping skills and instead exhibit negative behaviors (e.g., anger management, disrespectfulness, challenging authority, alcohol/drug misuse, unhealthy relationships, altercations, among other negative behaviors), with modules that specifically addresses the youth’s needs.

4. If the youth has completed the initial 5 CSEC training modules and no adverse negative behavior is exhibited then Phase 2 of training sessions and preventive care will be specifically focused on the identified needs of the youth (e.g., 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 mean populations who face barriers in accessing and using victim services, and include populations underserved because of geographic location, religion, sexual orientation, gender identity, 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 exploitation and sexual exploitation. The youth are primarily from low socio-economic 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 very limited services for youth at risk of exploitation and commercial sexual exploitation and TEND Court is designed to work with children in the Child Protection Court. Children in CPS Court are at heightened risk for exploitation and 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. 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 clients will be voluntary, not coerced. It is expected that youth “exit” from TEND Court when they turn 18 or 22 and have exited from CPS custody and care.
 - 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 exploitation 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 exploited or sex trafficked or at risk of being exploited or trafficked throughout the grant period.
2. Foster care placement or intensive treatment program. Judge Mireles's court can set up appropriate placements under the usual practice in her courtroom.
3. Serving Children and Adults in Need (SCAN) drug and 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 exploited and 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. PILLAR will provide immediate counseling services when the TEND Court youth are in placement transition from one placement to another, Child without Placement (CWOP) and counseling services have not been secured, to avoid counseling service gaps which increase the youth's inability to adapt at the new site.
7. PILLAR services will include a Crisis Team for counseling services to serve youth placed outside of Laredo/Webb County and need immediate counseling services none are available due to the placement's counselor not being available, on the weekend, after office hours, and Holidays.
8. 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.
9. 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.
10. Group counseling by a TEND Court counselor to assist 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 in developing coping skills. The counselor will be available to hold a group session with the caregivers of TEND Court youth (e.g., parents, foster parents, etc.).
11. Education – tutoring and mentoring. The TEND 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, to engage minors in empowerment activities that will enable them to develop goals for their future and find a pathway toward success. Each youth's 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 youths will have regressions, and it will be important for TEND Court to "meet the client at the level they're at" and be a net(work) as the client continues to grow and learn.

12. 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.
13. Mentoring to be aware of the crime of exploitation and sex trafficking. TEND Court will work with youth programs, community agencies, religious groups, and schools to provide educational programs or workshops on exploitation and 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.
14. Summer educational camps for youth (summer 2024). The TEND Executive Director will provide youth with educational opportunities during the summer.
15. Equine or dog therapy – Cuidado de Animales (Tending Animals). Pet therapy has been proven to be effective with persons who experience trauma. The Laredo Police Department has an Emotional Dog Therapy Program and will collaborate with the TEND Court to provide their services to the TEND Court youth. An Equine therapy component and Life Skills program is in the process of collaborating with the TEND Court to provide services for the TEND Court clients. 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 clients. We don't want victims to think of animal therapy and be confused with face-to-face or group counseling, we want clients to have a positive immediate response when asked if they will participate in Cuidado de Animales because the animals will tend to the clients while the clients will tend to the animals.
16. Art Therapy, and Music Therapy, like animal therapy, can be therapeutic. TEND Court's Executive Director will host art sessions, and music 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 art or the music sessions.

17. Medical services if necessary to assist youth with their physical health (e.g., bruises, pregnancy, etc.).
18. Brand/Tattoo removal services or brand/tattoo cover-up. 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.
19. Backpacks filled with personal care items and an activity kit will be provided to youth. TEND Court Executive Director will mail/deliver a backpack and travel-size toiletries, coloring, sketch, word find, puzzle books, colors/pencil colors, journal, towel, and socks, to assist the youth with coping skills during their placement transition and acclimatization period. In addition, on a case by case and ordered by Judge Mireles an MP3 player may be provided to assist the youth as an additional coping skill. Music will be approved and downloaded by the CPS caseworker only. If a TEND Court youth is relocated to a new placement, then the Executive Director will ensure that a new backpack will be sent to the TEND Court youth. 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 exploitation and commercial 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 services while engaging in objective research to ensure that victims of exploitation and 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

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.

bonded with their trafficker³⁷, they may not know that they are victimized, they may not know whom to 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 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 clients as needed; the services need to be tailored and responsive to the client’s needs.

TEND Court is in the beginning of its third 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 will be 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 exploitation and sex trafficking with multidimensional agency responses that address the needs of individual clients in the multi-jurisdictional legal environment of Laredo and Webb County in South Texas. According to SAMHSA

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>.

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: 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.

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>

(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.
- **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 and young adults in CPS court.
4. Coordinate identification and trauma-informed care responses among TEND Court, attorney's ad litem, 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 reports evaluating the services of TEND Court.

First and Second Objectives: To identify and provide services for minors who are, or maybe, victims of exploitation and 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 every quarter to the relevant stakeholders (October 1, 2024, through September 30, 2025). Dr. Bernat will assist the Executive Director in the process of evaluation and monitoring of the TEND Court.

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 clients 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 exploited and 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 the TEND Court identification of minors and diversion services protocols are followed. As the case diversion proceeds, the TEND Executive Director will

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>

ensure that identified clients are appropriately placed in services, that the client is voluntarily consenting to participate, and that all data collected by the Executive Director maintains appropriate legal, social service, educational, medical, and mental health confidences. Diversion services will be tailored to the individual client, it is imperative that the TEND Executive Director maintain accurate monthly logs, and work with relevant stakeholders, such as DFPS, SCAN, PILLAR, Common Thread, and the Child Advocacy Center, to ensure that each client has particularized diversion services offered and completed. As the victim completes the diversion, the diversion court will finalize the court record as required by law. The TEND Executive Director will ensure that legal representation is provided to the TEND Court clients and that the client 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 clients in the TEND Court program completed successfully 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 client's unidentifiable information, and present all data in the aggregate. All data will have clients identified by a unique case identification number so that the client 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 and assigned TEND Court computer. *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 exploitation and commercial sexual exploitation;
- create a network of legal, social, and mental health providers to respond to exploited and commercial sex exploitation of youth;
- use trained CSE-IT legal, social, and mental health providers to identify victims and persons at risk of exploitation and sexual exploitation;
- protect youth who are victims or potential victims of exploitation and sex trafficking;
- provide trauma-informed care services to exploited and sex trafficked victims to help them recover and heal; increase their self-confidence, promote self-efficacy, and divert them from continued or threatened risk of exploitation and sex trafficking victimization;
- increase community awareness and response to exploitation and 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 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 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 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		
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 will be several persons and agencies that be involved in the 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, the child advocacy center, mental health providers, domestic violence shelters, etc.) and will ensure that the program is identifying children at risk of exploitation, and 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 also bringing awareness to

much-needed causes such as mental health, and 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 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.

Before 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 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 before 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 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. Before 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, Texas A&M International University.

Dr. Bernat is a retired Regents Professor of Criminal Justice from Texas A&M International University and Emerita from the Criminal Justice and Criminology Department at Arizona State University. She has been overseeing research and evaluation programs about 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 numerous academic and community awards for her scholarship, teaching, and community service. She completed the Child Sex Exploitation Identification Tool (CSE-IT) training in 2020.