



To: Texas Judges Who Hear CPS Cases

From: The Honorable Robin Sage and The Honorable Dean Rucker,
Jurists in Residence, Supreme Court Children's Commission

Date: September 15, 2015

RE: Child and Adolescent Needs and Strengths (CANS) Assessment for Foster Children

During the 84th Legislative Session, the Texas Legislature passed Senate Bill (SB) 125, which requires DFPS to deploy statewide and in a uniform manner a developmentally appropriate, comprehensive assessment to be administered within 45 days of a child entering conservatorship. Currently all children coming into conservatorship receive assessments; however, the types of assessments vary. Many, but not all, include a trauma screening as well as interviews with individuals who have knowledge about the child's needs. SB125 provides the funding and the opportunity to develop a standardized assessment that includes these critical features, and permits DFPS to negotiate the use of the new assessment with STAR Health, which is the managed care program that provides for the physical and behavioral health needs of all children in DFPS conservatorship.

Q: What is the CANS for?

A: CANS is intended to provide uniformity and consistency in evaluating a child's needs and strengths, assist in service planning, inform placement decisions, and also reduce the number of assessments children in DFPS conservatorship undergo.

Q: What is the timeline for CANS implementation?

A: In June, DFPS began discussing contracting, capacity building, training and the implementation process involved in creating and utilizing a new assessment tool, but only received funding to implement the legislation on September 1, 2015. With this funding, DFPS is contracting with Dr. John Lyons, a clinical psychologist and inventor of the CANS, to develop of a version that is specific to Texas and to the unique needs of children and families in the Texas child welfare system. The Texas CANS tool will be available beginning in March 2016.

Q: Who will administer the CANS?

A: With few exceptions, the CANS assessments will be administered by licensed mental health professionals through STAR Health. For more on STAR Health, please see the Bench Book chapter entitled *Health Care for Texas Children in Foster Care: STAR Health* located at <http://benchbook.texaschildrenscommission.gov/>.

Q: Will caseworkers receive training?

A: The Texas Legislature also provided funds for select regional staff to receive additional training to become experts and to assist caseworkers and supervisors in learning how to use the CANS assessment results for case and service planning. Frontline caseworkers will receive online training.

Q: Will other stakeholders receive training?

A: DFPS is working with external stakeholders to identify training needs. Part of the legislative funding is for consultation with Dr. Lyons regarding how to best communicate with and train key stakeholders, including legal and

judicial stakeholders. The CANS report will be informative for courts, CASA, providers and others in working toward permanency for children in foster care.

Q: How will the results of the CANS be made available to me?

A: Recommendations from the CANS report will be included in the child's court report. The CANS report itself will be stored in the child's Health Passport.