

For Immediate Release – April 24, 2007

Contact: Karen Amacker, 512-924-6518

## Texas Association Against Sexual Assault (TAASA) Statement on the Jessica Lunsford Act (CSHB8)

"TAASA supports efforts to end sexual abuse of children and adults alike, but these efforts cannot end with sentencing guidelines. Very little information is collected in our state on sexual assault, particularly child sexual assault. While many can speculate, with the recent changes in CSHB8, no one really knows how the Jessica Lunsford Act will impact the reporting of child sexual abuse to law enforcement, the prosecution of child sexual assault cases by Texas district and county attorneys, or the number of convictions of sexually violent criminals.

"What we do know for certain is **that sexual violence is a pervasive problem** to which no community, ethnic population, age group or socio-economic class is immune.

"On the Senate floor today, Senator Deuell (R-Greenville) spoke about the use of mandatory minimum sentencing as a deterrent to potential sex offenders. In reality, sex offenders are some of the most manipulative, intelligent and predatory of all violent criminals. Harsher punishments will not prevent Texas children, men or women from falling victim to sexual violence. The Texas Legislature must work to prevent sexual violence **before it ever happens** and to ensure that, when it does, the services to support sexual assault victims and their families are **available in every Texas county and fully funded** to meet the demand for those services.

"The Legislature's work on sexual violence is not complete. Significant legislation by Sen. West (D-Dallas) and Rep. Cohen (D-Houston), CSHB1751, would create the revenue stream necessary to ensure that sexual violence in Texas is addressed **from every angle** – prevention, research, response and sex offender management and treatment. Texas Senators and Representatives must continue legislating support for sexual assault survivors, and safe, effective management and treatment of sex offenders in continued consultation with Texas sexual violence experts and victim advocates.

"We hope that the Jessica Lunsford Act is more than a political statement, meant to please voters and lull Texas communities into a false sense of safety. To truly increase the safety of Texas communities, **it is critical that the Texas Legislature pass CSHB1751** as well as study the effects of the Jessica Lunsford Act and other passed legislation over the next biennium.

"Next session the legislature must return to the table prepared to honestly examine the impact of these laws and evaluate past efforts. Texans have learned the price of avoiding sexual assault issues with the investigation of the Texas Youth Commission this year. To prevent another TYC, legislators must ensure that the debate on sexual assault – against all Texans - remains a priority in coming sessions.

### About Texas Association Against Sexual Assault (TAASA)

The Texas Association Against Sexual Assault (TAASA) is the statewide organization committed to ending sexual violence in Texas. A non-profit educational and advocacy organization based in Austin, TAASA member agencies comprise a statewide network of more than 80 crisis centers that serve rural as well as metropolitan areas. Founded in 1982, the agency has a strong record of success in community education, legal services, youth outreach, law enforcement training, legislative advocacy, and curricula and materials development. Additional information about TAASA can be found at [www.taasa.org](http://www.taasa.org).

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