

Cecelia Hartley

From: Ellen Smith
Sent: Tuesday, November 25, 2008 9:59 AM
To: Sunset
Subject: comment on proposed Juvenile Justice Department

As a 15-year judge in the Tarrant County Juvenile Court, I am adamantly opposed to the abolishment of the Texas Juvenile Probation Commission and the proposed "merger" of its responsibilities with the Texas Youth Commission.

As long as TJPC has existed, it has provided first-rate services and support for local probation departments throughout Texas. It has gathered statistical information which has increased the efficiency of current programming and targeted future needs for planning and prudent budgeting. It has created consistent standards of quality for juvenile probation departments in Texas, which has provided a more just and competent system of service delivery to children state-wide. It has provided training and support not only for probation departments and officers, but also for juvenile justice practitioners, attorneys, and the Texas judiciary, which has increased our professionalism and competence. It has performed all of these functions on a lean administrative budget.

While TJPC and TYC are both charged with providing services to Texas children, the missions of each agency are entirely different. I fear that combining these two very different systems will drastically reduce funding for community programming. Services provided by local probation departments divert children from "incarceration" and allow a large majority to remain in the community with their families, which results in huge cost savings to Texas taxpayers. It is critical that the funding for these community services continue, but when compared with the staggering cost of running residential facilities for children, the budget for community services most likely will significantly decrease.

Although TYC may currently be in a state of turmoil, there is absolutely no sound reason to eliminate a healthy, efficient, competent, and proven state agency in order to try to shore up what may be perceived as a failing agency. I have confidence that the newly appointed director of TYC will be able to work with the director of TJPC to create a workable and efficient continuum of services to children in the Texas juvenile justice system, without the necessity and cost-inefficiencies of recreating the wheel.

Sincerely,

Ellen S. Smith
Associate Judge
323rd District Court, Tarrant County, Texas

11/25/2008

Cecelia Hartley

From: Leah Campbell
Sent: Wednesday, November 26, 2008 10:20 AM
To: Cecelia Hartley
Subject: FW: Staff Recommendation 1.1

From: Ellen Smith
Sent: Wednesday, November 26, 2008 8:34 AM
To: Leah Campbell
Subject: Staff Recommendation 1.1

Re: Staff Recommendation 1.1 Abolish TYC and TJPC and transfer their functions to a newly created state agency, the Texas Juvenile Justice Department, with a sunset date of 2015

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Ellen S. Smith
Associate Judge
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