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OLEN UNDERWOOD JUVENILE JUSTICE CENTER
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Director

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November 20, 2008

The Honorable Carl Isett
Texas House of Representatives
P.O. Box 2910
Austin, Texas 78768-2910

Re: Sunset Advisory Commission review of Texas Youth Commission, Texas Juvenile Probation Commission and Office of Independent Ombudsman

Dear Chairman Isett:

Thank you for the opportunity to respond to the staff recommendations regarding the Texas Juvenile Probation Commission and the Texas Youth Commission. As the Director of a medium size Juvenile Probation Department for fifteen years, I strongly oppose the recommendation to abolish both agencies and create a new "Juvenile Justice Department".


The agencies have two distinct functions. TJPC works with the counties with an emphasis on community based programming and TYC operates institutions for the most serious offenders. In reviewing the report it appears that TJPC is meeting its mission. On the other hand TYC began experiencing management problems which ultimately lead to the abuses exposed in 2007. It is clear to me that the recommendations contained in the report are a response to the TYC management issues not issues related to TJPC. The report cited two primary concerns related to TJPC. They are a lack of communication with TYC and the lack of joint strategic planning and training. Don't combine a dysfunctional agency (TYC) with a functioning agency (TJPC). This will only transfer the problems.

I ask that you do not consolidate. Instead leave the agencies separate and mandate (by statute) areas to collaborate, i.e. training, information management, strategic planning, research and data integrity for all juvenile justice agencies. Allow the newly appointed Executive Director of TYC time to implement reform called for in SB 103. It will be advantageous to add additional resources to the counties to enable more juveniles to be diverted from TYC. Counties have been

very successful in providing local programming that has already effectively reduced the number of commitments to TYC.

Please contact me if you need additional information on this important issue.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Ron Leach', written over the typed name.

Ron Leach
Director Montgomery County Juvenile Probation