

TEXAS ASSOCIATION *of* COUNTIES

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Karen Ann Norris, Executive Director

November 26, 2008

Sunset Advisory Commission
P.O. Box 13066
Austin, Texas 78711

Dear Sunset Advisory Commission Members:

Thank you for the opportunity to respond to the Sunset recommendations on the futures of the Texas Youth Commission and Texas Juvenile Probation Commission. The Texas Association of Counties remains cautious of legislation which would result in an increase in local property taxes and place an additional hardship on the overburdened local property taxpayers.

Currently, the TJPC and TYC operate independently with two distinctly different missions for serving the unique needs of their respective populations through a series of accelerated accountability programs and service delivery systems. The Juvenile Probation Commission serves as the "pass-through" agency for State-to-Local funding and sets the minimum standards for treatment, supervision and care of juvenile offenders at the local level where successful deterrence from the full juvenile justice system is most effective. The Texas Youth Commission receives the comparably smaller number of youth committing higher level crimes, requiring more intensive services, and in which continued placement in communities is either not feasible or no longer proving productive.

With the two distinctive service regimens in mind, it is important to note that throughout the recommendations and in its *Fiscal Implication* section, the Sunset Commission report touches on "initial appropriations" and "start up" costs for counties participating in the community corrections pilot program, and addresses financial *savings to the State*. The analysis, however, appears to leave open-ended the impact at the county level for issues such as increased county funding for the establishment and long term operations of community programs, increased probation caseloads serving children with accelerated needs, as well as a permanent, dedicated allocation of State support after the "pilot" program expires.

The Sunset staff recommendations highlight organizational structure, collaboration and communication as primary areas of improvement justifying the streamlining of services as a cost benefit to the State. While those items have merit, regardless of which side receives the cost

benefit, it is possible to accomplish those goals, between the two agencies, while continuing the full implementation of Senate Bill 103 reforms initiated in 2007.

The Texas Association of Counties works with judges, attorneys and other stakeholders involved with the daily operation and management of juvenile justice at the county level. TAC would appreciate the opportunity to continue working with policy makers in 2009 to ensure improved policy structures at the State level complement efficient, successful and fiscally responsible service delivery at the local level.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Karen Ann Norris".

Karen Ann Norris
Executive Director

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