

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

Dear Sir,

My name is Dan Collins. I live in New Braunfels, Texas. I am writing to share my concerns regarding the Sunset Staff Report on the Texas Youth Commission, Texas Juvenile Probation Commission, and Office of Independent Ombudsman.

As a person who has worked in the field of Juvenile Justice continuously since 1992, I want to very briefly offer my perspective on the recommendations within this report. I would also disclose that I did work for TYC from 1996 to 2002, and the balance of time I've worked in this field has been at the county level.

It is my opinion that the report subjectively misrepresents information that would suggest that the entire juvenile justice system in our state is broken and in need of complete overhaul. From the first sentence of the report summary, which states "The Sunset reviews of the Texas Youth Commission and the Texas Juvenile Probation Commission occurred during upheaval and reform in the juvenile justice system." the report overstates and generalizes the problems that are in the process of being addressed, and casts a dark shadow over the wealth of positive work and committed staff who are struggling to make this system better every day.

This report is able to focus on recent problems within TYC which have been widely publicized both within and beyond the juvenile justice field, but rather than separating these problems from the pattern of adaptability and proactive change that has been shown by TJPC, the report summary characterizes TYC as "the system". Furthermore, the report does no justice to the reform and improvement efforts that are underway now by the staff and new administration at TYC.

The Financial Implication Summary is consistent with the tone of the rest of the report. I find it deceptively simple and one-sided, making the less than profound conclusion that by closing facilities, eliminating positions, and reducing salaries of remaining staff, the state will save money. With only five director-level positions identified as duplicative, it would seem that all the other cuts would result in some reduction in services. I don't think this is the way to save money, especially in organizations that have been scrutinized and trimmed in the past.

I compliment the report's clarity, and consistency in making points to support its conclusion, but as a practitioner in this field, with the experiences that I've had and the acquaintances I've made, I do not support recommendation 1.1, or any other recommendations stemming directly from this. My values in opposing this include preservation of local control in government, and conservatism in growing or creating new agencies.

In the future, it is possible that circumstances may exist that favor reorganizing or consolidating the juvenile justice agencies at the state level, but in the current atmosphere of reactionary, fearful, and punitive measures to stop the damage at TYC, I think this is the wrong time to "tear it all down" and start over. Let's stay the course, let quality people have the room and resources to work, and gauge the results after SB103 has been borne by the professionals who are now in office.

Respectfully,

Dan Collins

cc: Senator Jeff Wentworth
Representative Doug Miller