

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

Dear Recipient:

I wanted to address the proposed restructuring of the Texas Juvenile Justice System. To put my opinion in perspective, I will disclose that I have worked in the Juvenile Justice field for over 8 years, in a mid-sized Juvenile probation department.

I think the proposal to abolish both TYC and TJPC would be the same as throwing the baby out with the bathwater. While I agree that the consolidation of TYC and TJPC would allow for a more contiguous continuum of services, I think that TJPC should remain, and should be allowed to oversee both programs. If it needs to be relabeled you can call in the "Texas Juvenile Services Commission" and allow for more of a focus on "Services" rather than "Justice", because as juveniles, the focus should be on rehabilitation and support, and the term "justice" seems more in line with "Punishment" and "Retribution".

There have been a multitude of well-published complaints and problems within the TYC program, while TJPC has remained strong, and actively audits and self-regulates. TJPC has more of a focus on prevention programs and supervision, to prevent wherever possible, the need for TYC placement. TYC does have strong rehabilitative components, but it can only be effective if it is well-managed, which has proven to be lacking.

For example, one thing that I feel is lacking from TYC is a strong after-care component. When Juveniles are released from TYC they are placed on parole, however there are very few parole officers to cover vast areas, and therefore the supervision of these juveniles is very sparse, and the support programs available to them are largely non-existent.

Juveniles on probation are very closely monitored, they are seen several times a month, and they and their families have opportunities to participate in many supportive programs and services. Juveniles in TYC are completely cloistered, and immersed in rehabilitative programs, but when they are released, they not only need to relearn how to live in society, they are usually returned to the same family and environment they left. Without strong aftercare supervision and support, it is too easy for them to fall. A "once a month check-in" is not enough, they need more assistance to be able to apply what they have learned, and not just be dropped like a hot potato.

By maintaining the TJPC system, the TYC programs could be incorporated as part of a continuum, and the needs of the juveniles and their families could more easily be met. TJPC is already involved with overseeing the services provided to 95% of the youth in the "system", while TYC serves only 5%. TJPC is also involved with managing and overseeing several residential facilities, therefore expanding their range to cover the other "5%" I feel is well within their capabilities.

I agree there have been problems with the oversight of the TYC system, however being that they only cover 5% of the juveniles, while the agency that covers the other 95% is doing a good job, it makes no sense to throw out both systems. It makes a lot more sense to let the system that is doing well broaden their wings a little to incorporate and improve the TYC system, and allocate them the resources needed in order to do that.

Please consider this when you make your decisions.
Sincerely,

Lonnie L. Dolle, LMSW
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