

Van Zandt County



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RHITA KOCHES
COUNTY JUDGE

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December 9, 2008

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

Via Fax (512) 463-0705

Honorable Members:

This correspondence is in response to the Sunset Commission Staff recommendations of November 11, 2008, which would eliminate the Texas Juvenile Probation Commission and Texas Youth Commission and create a new agency called the Texas Juvenile Justice Department effective on September 30, 2009. It appears that the concerns cited by the Sunset Commission staff are primarily related to management failures of the Texas Youth Commission. It does not make sense to try to fix their problems by eliminating a State Agency (TJPC) that is functioning properly.

The Texas Juvenile Probation Commission oversees and works with individual counties to provide a continuum of community-based services designed to meet the individual needs of the youth unique to each individual county. The current system is working. TJPC allows counties to make their own decisions and develop creative and effective programs and services designed to divert youth from the State institutions. The Van Zandt County Juvenile Probation Department has committed only one youth to TYC over the past 4 years.

The Texas Youth Commission has a unique role in the State Juvenile Justice System. TYC has an entirely different mission and responsibility, which is to operate institutions for the most serious and chronic youthful offenders which cannot be treated successfully within the community. It is obvious that TYC must develop a plan of action which addresses management and operational problems as well as implement some major adjustments.

However, larger is not necessarily better. To lump funding and children into one pot or a one-size-fits-all program is not the best approach. The creation of a huge bureaucracy will reduce the effectiveness of local juvenile probation departments by decreasing the responsiveness of the State to local departments needs. Standards and regulations will increase with little regard to local control.

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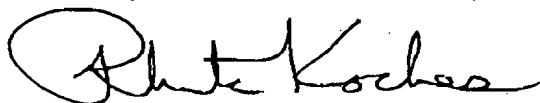
The modification of state funding streams will almost certainly assure that, when there are cuts to State budgets, the funding to local departments will be the first to be cut.

The funding reductions proposed are almost entirely tied to TYC functions, including eliminating TYC facility staff and the duplication of senior administrative positions. Those same results could be achieved through proper management and administration of the Texas Youth Commission.

For these reasons, I would strongly oppose the recommendation of the Sunset Commission staff for the elimination of the Texas Juvenile Probation Commission and would urge that the Texas Juvenile Probation Commission agency remain a separate agency with oversight of the individual counties, including Van Zandt County.

Thank you for your help and attention in this matter.

Sincerely,



Rhita Koches
Van Zandt County Judge

c:

Laura Nicholes
Legislative Liaison
Texas Association of Counties