

Texas Juvenile Justice Department  
Response to the Independent Ombudsman  
First Quarter Report, FY 2013  
January 21, 2013

The First Quarter report identified OIO activities for September through November 2012, with the main focus on summarizing OIO activities. The report briefly summarized the following observations, noting:

- TJJD is involved in continued efforts that have resulted in progress controlling the number of youth on youth assaults.
- TJJD staff turnover remains high, however TJJD staff report vacant positions are being quickly filled, creating better staff to youth ratios.
- Morale in TJJD operated state facilities appears to be growing and the OIO believes continued improvement in morale should have positive effects on turnover rates.
- OIO is optimistic that TJJD is turning a corner as the new administration seeks input from various outside sources to evaluate the agency.

### **Phoenix Update**

The Phoenix program has been in operation at the Mart Facility for six months. There are currently fifteen (15) youth assigned to the program. To date, there have been no incidents of assault with bodily injury on staff in the Phoenix program. The TJJD Internal Audit department reviewed the program and published their report in November. The entire Phoenix management team reviewed the findings with Rebecca Thomas, Director of Integrated State Programs and Facilities. The team is creating an action plan in response to the findings of the audit department, which were primarily related to administration and application of policy.

The program has been reviewed by a national consultant, Dr. David Rousch. Dr. Rousch reviewed the program in conjunction with a review of facility operations and facility culture for staff and youth at the Mart program. The onsite review took place the week of January 7 – 10, 2013 and a formal report is forthcoming.

### **TJJD System wide efforts**

Executive leadership continues to move forward with agency wide initiatives to increase the safety and security for staff and youth as well as improve facility culture and staff morale. The following are some of the significant initiatives that have taken place:

- Management initiatives coupled with training on self-harm behaviors have resulted in a marked decrease in non-suicidal self injury (NSSI) incidents at the Corsicana facility. Actions continue to improve facility safety and reduce availability to students for items that can be used to cause injury. The Director of Specialized Treatment additionally reviewed the suicide alert policy with all clinical staff at Corsicana in conjunction with a staffing of all youth at the facility on Suicide Alert status being monitored 1:1 in the month of January.

- Executive staff directed a comprehensive review of the security unit at the Mart Facility to include file reviews and comparison of policy to current practice. All security staff was re-trained on security policy in December 2012. Scheduling practices are under review at all facilities to ensure appropriate practice, reduce overtime and improve assignment of staff to build consistency in assignment. Overtime at Corsicana was reduced by approximately \$60,000 in the month of December and staff report morale has significantly improved with new leadership at the facility.
- Executive staff implemented a change in the JCO job description requiring that a JCO must be a minimum of 21 years of age in order to be employed at TJJD.
- The State Facilities and Programs division is working closely with Human Resources to ensure that facility supervisory staff are actively participating in the interview and selection process at the facility level for JCO staff. There is an expectation that this will improve the quality of selected candidates, improve supervisory investment in the training process and result in hired employees remaining on the job at higher than current rates.
- The State Facilities and Programs division continues to work closely with Human Resources to evaluate the JCO classroom and on the job training program to improve the quality of training provided. Significant changes in this process are expected by April which will include more staff and youth engagement earlier in the process so that staff are better prepared to communicate effectively with youth.
- A Behavior Management and Treatment Task Force has been developed with representation from all high-restriction facilities, halfway houses, parole, youth rights, training and treatment. The Task Force will review current policies and practices and recommend redesign based on evidence-based programs and comprehensive feedback from TJJD employees statewide.
- Additionally, TDCJ completed safety reviews at each facility providing valuable feedback on areas of vulnerability.

TJJD continues to appreciate the efforts of the OIO to ensure safety and security is maintained for TJJD youth and staff. We will continue to make systemic improvements that will enable youth to be successful in rehabilitation efforts.