



TEXAS
JUVENILE JUSTICE
DEPARTMENT

**Response to the Independent Ombudsman
Third Quarter Report, FY 2025
January 8, 2026**

The Texas Juvenile Justice Department (TJJD) received the Third Quarter Report for Fiscal Year 2025 from the Office of the Independent Ombudsman (OIO) on December 12, 2025. The report covers the time period between March and May 2025. The following provides a response to the report and updates on ongoing agency efforts.

General Updates and Staffing Information

In alignment with TJJD's response to previous quarterly reports, the agency agrees with OIO's analysis that staff vacancies were the most serious problem facing the juvenile justice system during the third quarter of fiscal year 2025. Recruitment and retention remain major challenges at TJJD, and the agency continues to dedicate significant time and resources to making improvements.

In TJJD's second quarter response, the agency listed the following initiatives that employees have tackled simultaneously to improve staffing strength:

- Working with the Office of the Governor and Texas Legislature to increase pay for direct-care staff, particularly juvenile correctional officers (JCOs);¹
- Implementing recruitment bonuses and higher pay for hard-to-fill or high-risk positions;
- Expanding recruitment and outreach activities in communities surrounding secure facilities;
- Streamlining the hiring process so the agency can better identify qualified job candidates and bring them onto the team as efficiently as possible;
- Updating initial and ongoing training to help staff understand and execute on-the-job expectations;
- Expanding training for supervisors to strengthen the agency's bench of leaders and ensure direct reports receive the support they need to fulfill the agency's mission; and
- Gaining approval of and developing initial designs for two new state secure facilities located near population centers.

These efforts are ongoing, as noted in the Annual HR Management Plan posted on the agency's website.² In 2026, TJJD will also conduct another agencywide survey to better understand employees' support needs, and leadership will develop staffing plans for the new facilities slated

¹ The most recent raise went into effect on September 1, 2025, after the Legislature passed the FY2026-27 General Appropriations Act during the 89th regular session.

² TJJD's bill pattern in the General Appropriations Act requires the agency to develop an annual plan to improve employee morale and retention. To review TJJD's plan published in October 2025, visit the agency's website [here](#).

to open next biennium. As these projects progress, TJJD will inform OIO about key findings, commitments, and outcomes.

In TJJD's most recent response, the agency also provided an overview of steps taken to address youths' rising acuity levels and related behaviors, including aggressive incidents noted in OIO's report. Targeted protocols related to de-escalation, violence intervention, and egregious behavior paired with the implementation of Dialectical Behavior Therapy, integrated treatment plans, and behavior change programs aim to increase safety for youth and staff alike. Additionally, an overhaul of JCO training curriculum, structure, and continuing education expectations rolled out in 2025. Changes emphasize industry best practices, on-the-job coaching opportunities, and real-world mastery of milieu management principles.

These programming, operations, treatment, and training efforts work together to move the Texas Model forward and institutionalize safety-focused culture change. TJJD will continue assessing model implementation and will make necessary adjustments based on staff feedback, dorm outcomes, and recommendations included in OIO's upcoming case study.

Thus far, these initiatives have helped the agency make significant progress since the height of our staffing crisis in mid-2022. Between the end of fiscal years 2022 and 2025, TJJD increased its staffing strength by nearly 300 JCOs. With more staff resources, TJJD's secure facilities absorbed 200 additional youth, increasing the average daily youth population from about 550 to 750. Despite an uptick in staffing levels, TJJD still manages a waitlist of committed youth who require state care. Throughout fiscal year 2025, the agency moved over 550 youth off of the waitlist and into secure facilities. The pace of this movement increased during the current fiscal year. Between September and December 2024, TJJD admitted 162 youth into secure facilities from the waitlist; during the same timeframe in 2025, TJJD admitted 234 youth (a 44% increase). As of January 5, 2026, 132 youth were waiting at the county level of the system for a staffed state bed.

While improvements are occurring, TJJD recognizes the difficulties that the waitlist poses to county juvenile probation departments across the state. This issue demonstrates the continued need for both TJJD's retention efforts *as well as* increased attention on local diversion opportunities so fewer youth require state intervention in the first place. In Spring 2024, TJJD began working with the Meadows Mental Health Policy Institute to identify local resource gaps that contribute to juvenile justice involvement, particularly commitment to TJJD custody. Anticipated for release in early 2026, final analyses will include regional and statewide diversion recommendations to fill these gaps. TJJD will then use the recommendations to craft a long-term strategic plan focused squarely on ways to expand and enhance support for cross-system, youth-serving partners. Staff will take ideas in the plan — such as opportunities to revise outdated funding formulas and commitments to invest in crisis response infrastructure — to stakeholders throughout the first half of 2026. Agency leadership will seek board approval for the strategic plan in August. As staff develop drafts, TJJD will inform and seek feedback from OIO before final publication.

Other Major Initiatives

In addition to the projects described above, TJJD staff remain engaged in constant process improvement initiatives designed to enhance agency efficiency, effectiveness, and transparency. While not exhaustive, the information below highlights key priorities over the next several months.

Team reorganization: As noted in the second quarterly report response, TJJD started fiscal year 2026 with multiple team reorganizations in process. The most significant revamp occurred within TJJD's probation and parole services teams. Moving forward, seven regional managers will support youth in the community, both those served at the county level of the system and those exiting state-level care. Additionally, seven continuum of care coordinators will help each probation region fill the service gaps that the agency is seeking to address in our long-term strategic plan. As of January 2026, the agency has filled all regional support positions. Our focus now shifts to ensuring regional employees have the tools, training, and expertise needed to assist county partners effectively.

Targeted state monitoring: In January 2026, TJJD began implementation of new monitoring processes within state secure facilities. Youth Safety Managers assigned to each facility launched heightened monitoring of suicide alert and observation procedures. On established schedules, these staff members will review relevant documentation, incident information, equipment inventories, physical plant issues, and training, among other ongoing tasks.

Staff uniforms: During the 89th legislative session, lawmakers allocated critical resources to TJJD for JCO uniforms. Working in close partnership with the Texas Department of Criminal Justice (TDCJ), TJJD developed uniform designs and distribution processes. Following approval from the Legislative Budget Board, TJJD will place orders with TDCJ and launch this change to increase professionalism and consistency across campuses.

Leadership academy: After years of delivering agencywide supervisor training, TJJD began a new effort to expand its leadership bench. In January 2026, executive staff hosted their first Advanced Leadership Academy, a high-impact professional development training designed to strengthen collaboration and innovation throughout the agency. After the first cohort ends in March, the agency will assess outcomes, incorporate staff feedback, and invite a new group of employees to participate in the fall.