Independent Ombudsman

for the

Texas Juvenile Justice Department

First Quarter Report FY 26

September 1, 2025 to November 30, 2025

INTRODUCTION

This is the first Quarterly Report for Fiscal Year (FY) 2026 to be submitted by the Office of Independent Ombudsman for the Texas Juvenile Justice Department (TJJD) as per the Texas Human Resources Code, Chapter 261. This report is intended for the Governor, Lieutenant Governor, Speaker of the House, members of the State Legislature, the TJJD Governing Board, the TJJD Executive Director, and the Texas State Auditor. This report will cover the reporting period of September 2025 through November 2025. It should be noted, this is not an all-inclusive report, but rather a summary of significant findings during the reporting period.

STRATEGIC INTENT

The Office of Independent Ombudsman (OIO) was established for the purpose of investigating, evaluating, and securing the rights of children committed to the Juvenile Justice Department, including a child released under supervision before final discharge. Legislation enacted during the 84th Legislative Session (Senate Bill 1630), expanded those duties to include county post-adjudication facilities and contract facilities where county post-adjudicated youth are placed. To fulfill the duties of the office, OIO staff regularly visit all TJJD secure facilities, halfway houses, parole offices, all county post-adjudication facilities and county contract care programs. Currently, the Office of Independent Ombudsman conducts regular site visits at approximately 150 facilities and probation/parole offices that meet the definition added by Senate Bill 1630, 84th Legislative Session.

The Office of Independent Ombudsman (OIO) is required by statute to promote awareness of the Office and the services provided. This is accomplished through various initiatives. The Ombudsman meets with civic and advocacy groups to discuss issues, trends in juvenile justice and concerns with youth rights. The Office of Independent Ombudsman maintains a public web page describing the duties of the Office and how the Ombudsman may be contacted, either by phone, mail, or e-mail. In addition, the OIO periodically mails informational brochures regarding services of the OIO to the parents of youth newly committed to TJJD. In order to facilitate contact from youth in the facilities as well as the public, the OIO maintains a hotline that is answered 24 hours a day. The Deputy Ombudsmen distribute posters containing the OIO's hotline number to the facilities that are routinely visited, as well as educating youth on complaint procedures.

OPERATIONAL ACTIVITIES

Accounting of Site Visits, Youth Contact and Individual Cases

Ombudsman Metrics	Q1 2026
TJJD/Contract Site Visits	28
County Post Adjudicated/Contract Facility Site Visits	65
Number of Youth Interviews Conducted	903
Hours Spent Conducting Site Visits	550
Number of Youth Interviewed	785
Hours Spent Interviewing Youth/Staff	396
Number of Miles Traveled	20,628
Number of Hours On Travel Status	396
Hours spent reviewing video	887
Complaints	323

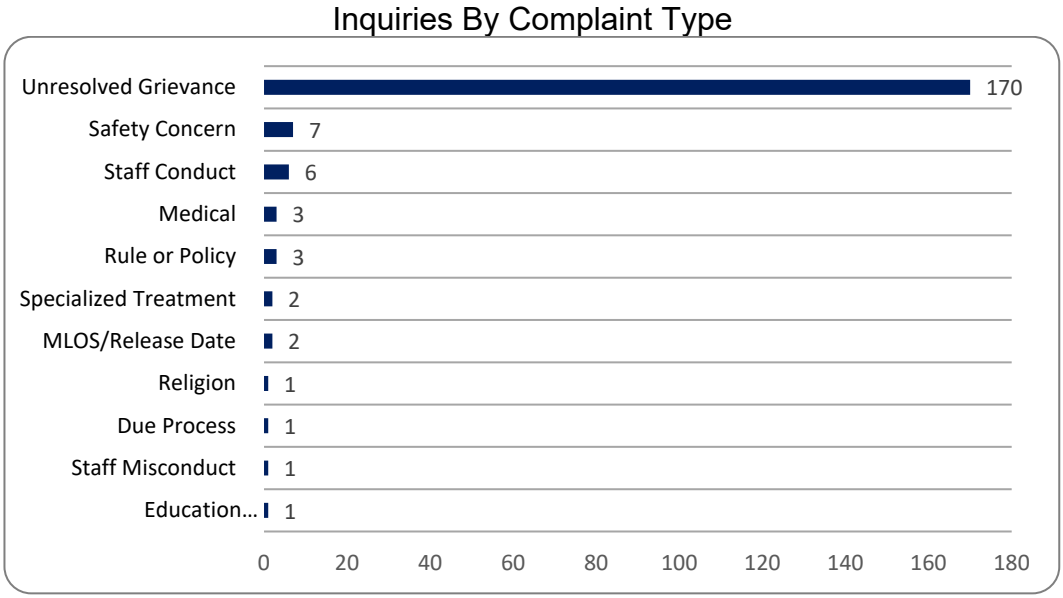
Complaints

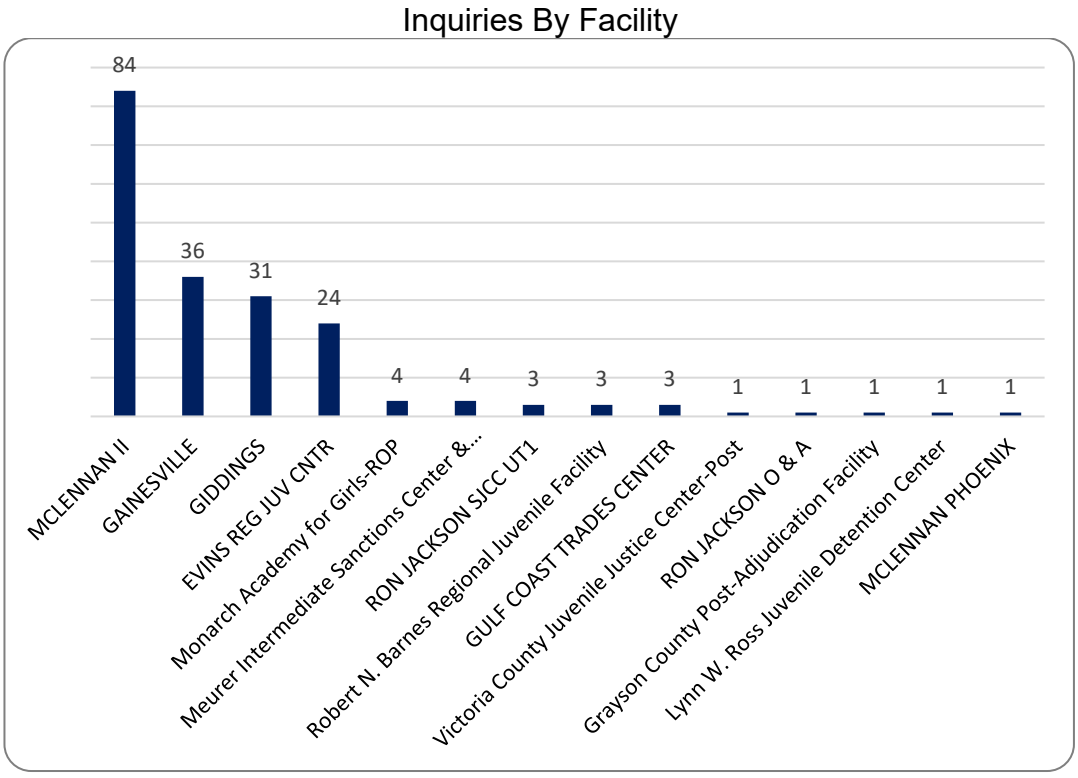
The OIO received and reviewed a total of 323 complaints in Q1 2026. A complaint is any issue regarding a youth in the custody of TJJD and a potential violation of their rights. These complaints are then examined by OIO staff to determine if the issue(s) warrant an inquiry (OIO jurisdiction), a referral to another entity (not OIO jurisdiction) or an Individual Case (in-depth inquiry of potential youth rights). Individual Cases are not opened until an initial inquiry has been conducted.

Inquiries

An inquiry is a review of potential youth rights violations conducted by the OIO. All inquiries are thoroughly reviewed and may include interviews of involved youth and staff, review of relevant paperwork, and video review. The OIO obtains information related to potential youth rights violations utilizing interviews, video review, documentation review, and consultation with other entities or divisions.

The OIO initiated 197 inquires during the first quarter of FY 26, 183 related to TJJD and 14 related to county post-adjudicated facilities.





Individual Cases

Inquiries involving serious issues related to youth rights may be opened as an Individual Case, which entails a more in-depth review and investigation of the issues. During the first quarter of FY 26, the OIO opened six complaints as individual cases, all involving TJJD youth. All six cases were at State facilities.

Facility	Type of Complaint	Number of Individual Cases
McLennan	Safety Concern	5
Evins Regional Juvenile Center	Safety Concern	1

Origin	Right Violated	Number of Cases	Facility
OIO Staff Initiated	Right to Protection from Physical and Psychological Harm	4	McLennan
OIO Staff Initiated	Right to Protection from Physical and Psychological Harm	1	Evins Regional Juvenile Center
Family Member of Youth	Right to Protection from Physical and Psychological Harm	1	McLennan

Closed Individual Cases

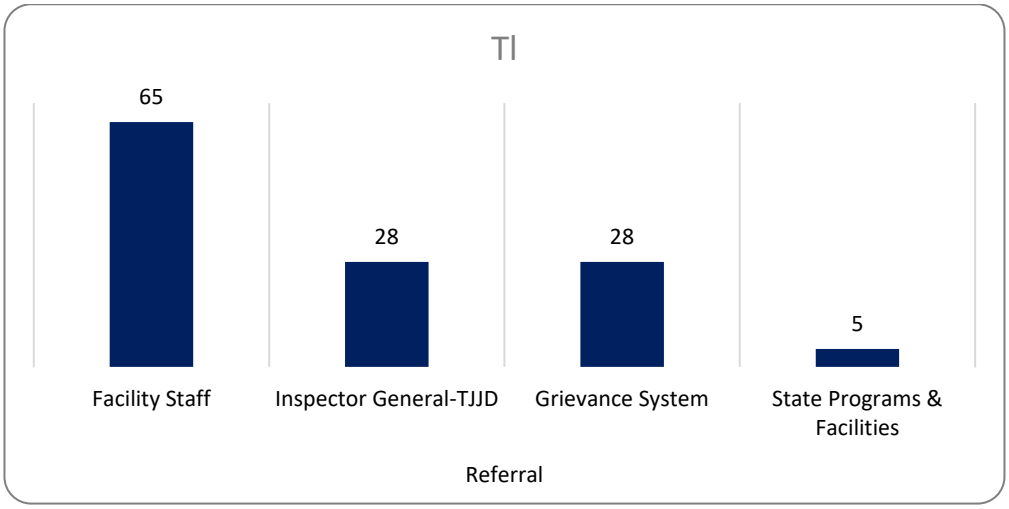
The OIO closed five individual cases involving a TJJD youth during the first quarter of FY 26.

Sustained-There is sufficient corroborated information to warrant noting and a follow-up response/action plan from the facility.
Not Sustained-There is insufficient information or evidence to prove or disprove the allegation.
Unfounded-The complaint is without merit or is within applicable law or policy.

Type Of Complaint	Status	Number of Cases	Facility
Specialized Treatment	Sustained	1	McLennan
Specialized Treatment	Unfounded	1	McLennan
Safety Concern	Sustained	2	McLennan
Safety Concern	Sustained	1	Ron Jackson

Referrals

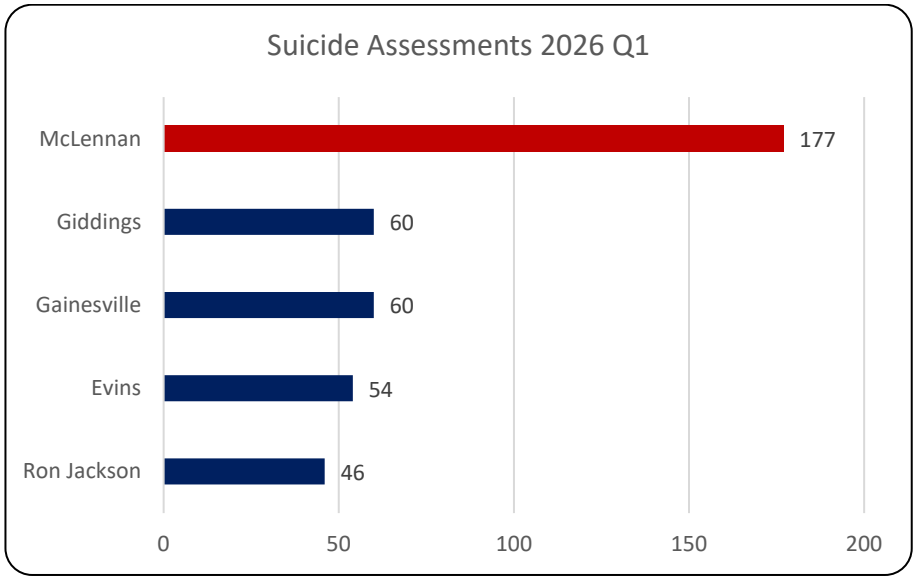
The OIO receives numerous complaints that, upon review, are either outside the scope of the OIO, a matter that should be addressed by facility staff or the grievance process, or better addressed by another agency or group. During the first quarter of FY 26, the OIO referred 126 complaints, 97 related to TJJD youth and 29 related to county post-adjudicated youth.



INCIDENT TRENDS FOR TJJD SECURE FACILITIES

Suicide Assessments

The following data represents the number of new assessments conducted, either from initial mental health screenings or suicide assessments, resulting in a youth who was not previously on suicide alert being placed on any kind of suicide alert.



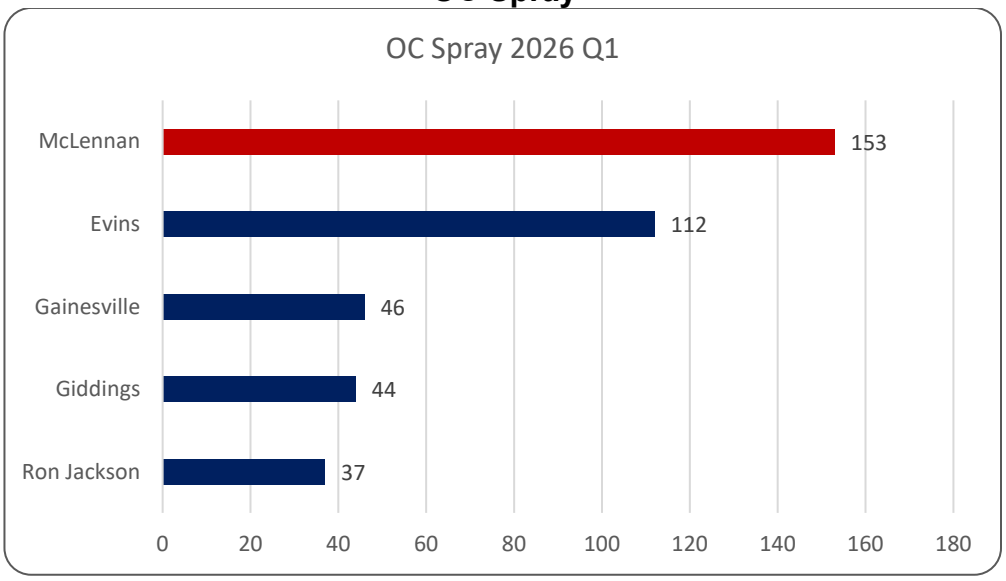
Use Of Force and Assaults

The OIO reviews, on a monthly basis, the number of incidents involving the use of OC pepper spray, the number of youth restrained, and assaults involving youth on youth and youth on staff at

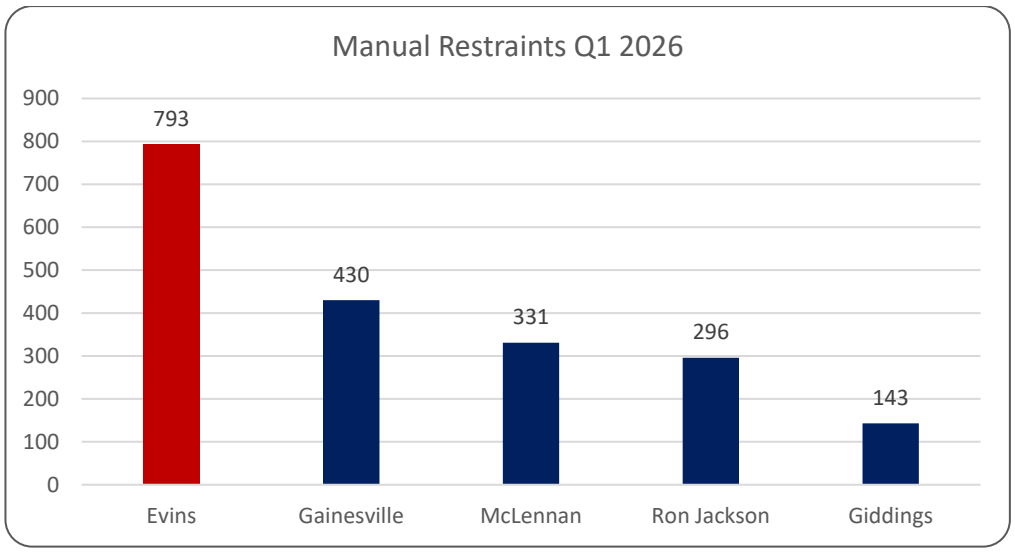
the secure correctional facilities. These metrics give the OIO some indication of the environment related to the safety and security of all the youth offenders as well as the staff within a particular facility. These metrics are by no means an absolute indicator and should be taken into context and combined with other factors when drawing conclusions regarding a particular facility.

During this reporting period, the OIO noted a discrepancy between the data on Use of Force (UOF) and Assaults reported to the Incident Reporting Center (IRC) and the same data in Connect (TJJD Youth case management system). It was determined that the file clerk at the McLennan County Correctional Facility had been experiencing difficulty in entering the UOF and assaultive behavior reports into Connect in a timely manner resulting in a lower number of UOF and assaulting behavior issues being reported below than the number that actually occurred. TJJD took action in an attempt to address and resolve this issue and the OIO belives the numbers will be more commensurate of actual behavior moving forward.

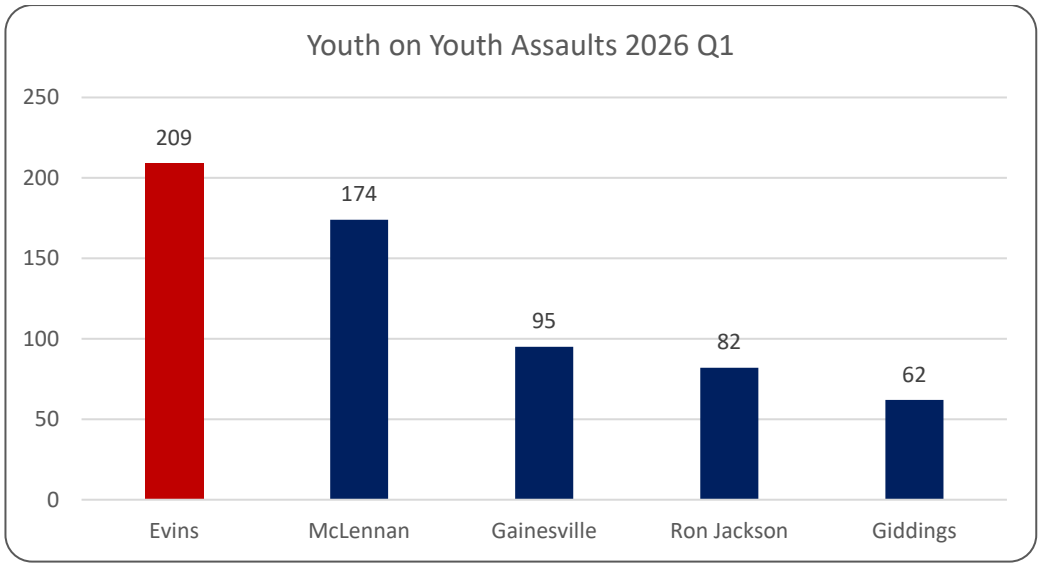
OC Spray



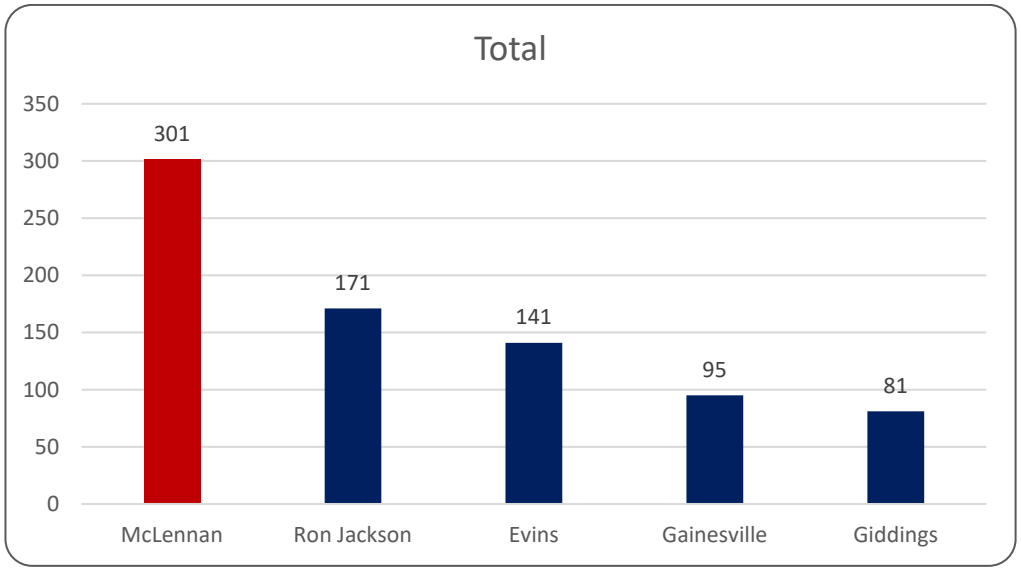
Manual Restraints



Assaults – Youth on Youth



Assaults – Youth on Staff



The OIO remains concerned about high staff turnover and staff shortages, which lead to staff fatigue and ultimately to decreased supervision of youth offenders in the state's secure facilities. TJJD has made a significant investment in the attempted hiring of additional staff, particularly in the Juvenile Corrections Officer (JCO) position, and continues to seek pay raises for this and other critical positions within the department.

During this reporting period, the OIO continued to observe several patterns regarding the safety and security of the state's secured facilities. The volume and the acuity level of assaults by youth offenders on the staff, particularly the Juvenile Corrections Officers (JCO), are still concerning. The assaultive conduct by the youth offenders generally appeared to be unprovoked by the staff, and it often led to an injury or the potential for serious injury being incurred by the JCOs, staff, and other youth as well. The OIO is still aware that this level of violence will increase the difficulty of TJJD in delivering programming to the youth committed to the department.

It should be noted that the OIO has observed several instances in which TJJD staff responded appropriately and/or in a timely manner, but the number of altercations or the severity of incidents overwhelmed the staff, leading to a potential or actual youth rights violation.

Additionally, the OIO reviewed several serious incidents that indicated the current training curriculum, or its delivery to the JCOs, needed review and potential overhaul. The OIO still has unresolved issues with confusing and potentially detrimental policies concerning the youth, which can lead to confusion for JCO/staff, responsiveness from JCOs to serious incidents, and a lack of situational awareness during stressful events such as restraints or suicidal behavior. Based on those concerns, a case study was assigned to an ombudsman during a previous reporting period, and the 1st phase of that study is complete, with recommendations provided. During this reporting period, the OIO tasked the agency data analyst with reviewing Individual Cases filed within the last 2 to 3 years to compare them with the recommendations in the case study. This analysis will encompass the 2nd phase of the study. Upon the completion of the entire study, it will be presented to TJJD. The OIO believes that TJJD is currently assessing and potentially changing policies and modules for training its JCO staff. The OIO believes that the recommendations from the case study will provide guidance in this endeavor.

The OIO continues to observe that the majority of Individual Cases opened and sustained for youth-rights violations have originated at the Mart State Juvenile Correctional Facility, followed by the Evins State Juvenile Correctional Facility. Based on concerns from these observations, I ordered several Senior Ombudsmen to conduct an additional site visit of the Mart facility to review TJJD’s response to serious incidents at that location. Those findings will be reported in a subsequent report.

The Gainesville and Giddings Correctional Facilities are, in the opinion of the OIO, the most stable of the TJJD institutions as of the date of this reporting.

Finally, the OIO is examining several serious incidents involving TJJD youth while on parole supervision. These inquiries will focus on the release process of these youth from TJJD to parole, as well as the supervision of these youth.

R. Sean McCleskey, Chief

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