Response to the Independent Ombudsman
Second Quarter Report, FY 2026
September 30, 2026

The Texas Juvenile Justice Department (TJJD) received the Second Quarter Report for Fiscal Year 2026 from the Office of the Independent Ombudsman (OIO) on September 8, 2026. The report covers the time period between December 2025 and February 2026. In this Quarter report, the OIO highlights incident trends, individual case findings, data concerns, staffing constraints, and the continuing high acuity of youth in TJJD's facilities. TJJD provides additional information and responses to several of these items.

Individual Cases

The OIO closed four individual cases this Quarter where the OIO sustained for alleged youth rights violations.

TJJD administrative rules lay out fourteen basic youth rights. *See* 37 Tex. Admin. Code § 380.9301. TJJD protects these rights in several ways, including training staff on proper de-escalation techniques, uses of force, interventions, and response requirements. TJJD monitors adherence to policy through regular on-site supervision, body-worn camera and overhead monitoring, incident debriefing, and through a strong collaboration with the OIO and the Office of Inspector General. When individual staff engage in misconduct, TJJD levies appropriate discipline and the Office of Inspector General conducts administrative investigation in abuse, neglect, exploitation as well as criminal investigations regarding any penal code violation. When TJJD officials are aware of a substantial risk, the agency acts swiftly to hold staff accountable and enact corrective action.

The OIO discusses how potential youth rights violations occur when staff "were slow to respond or failed to respond at all." The OIO also states that areas for retraining involve staff who were generally not "over-aggressive" or using "excessive force in response to" youth behavior. TJJD agrees. In the individual cases regarding protection from harm, the issues at hand were staff who were slow to respond to other youth aggression. In response, TJJD provided targeted training at all secure facilities regarding the agencies use of force continuum, and senior directors with the agency facilitated discussions with staff on recurring issues that are identified during debriefings and incident review.

TJJD appreciates the real-time information sharing from the OIO on identified issues regarding staff inaction. The OIO was also able to direct staff for additional review of the Mart State Juvenile Correctional Facility. The OIO stayed in communication with TJJD leadership during this review period and the facility was able to correct deficiencies in a swift manner due to the coordination between offices. OIO site visit reports in the months following this reporting period show improvement by TJJD in these areas.

TJJD Data

The OIO highlights data on suicide assessments, uses of force, and assaultive behavior by youth. This quarter saw reductions in serious incidents at TJJD secure facilities from the previous quarter. While total uses of manual and chemical restraints remained steady, TJJD facilities saw a 22% reduction in total major rule violations, a 14% reduction in youth-on-youth assaults, and a 7% reduction in youth-on-staff assaults.

The OIO highlights suicide assessments, providing numbers for new assessments conducted resulting in youth who were not previously on suicide alert being placed on any kind of suicide alert. The data the OIO provides is accurate across TJJD facilities. However, the number represents initial suicide assessments as it relates to the specific episode of suicidal behavior or ideation. These numbers do not represent unique youth who are placed on a suicide precaution for the first time.

The OIO also highlights a data discrepancy issue at the Mart State Juvenile Correctional Facility during this Quarter. TJJD leadership greatly appreciates the OIO in providing real-time information in the concerns they identified. Upon review, incidents were properly reported locally, through TJJD chains of command, and to the OIG Incident Reporting Center. There was an error in a previous data clerk being delayed in entering data. TJJD was able to enact corrective action on this issue and monitoring remains ongoing.

TJJD Staffing

The OIO documents their observation and concern about high staff turnover and staffing shortages throughout TJJD facilities. The OIO also discusses some measures TJJD is taking in recruiting and retaining JCO staff. In previous quarterly report responses, TJJD has provided information on the staff hiring and retention initiatives. These include: working with the Office of the Governor and the Texas Legislature to secure direct-care salary increases; expanding recruitment and outreach activities; streamlining hiring processes; updating initial and ongoing training, including additional on-the-job training for new-hire JCOs; expanding supervisor and leadership training; and targeted focus on agency culture. While this information post-dates this reporting period, TJJD is encouraged by the results of these efforts. TJJD lowered the JCO turnover rate from 66.48% in FY 25 to 57.62% in FY 26. While the effort in fully stabilizing JCO staffing is far from over, the agency is seeing promising trends in the retention of JCOs.

Parole Services

The OIO also documents their review of treatment and release processes for youth from TJJD Secure facilities. Following discussion with the OIO, TJJD reinforced requirements and documentation regarding the justification for waivers and the opportunities provided to youth to engage in rehabilitation that is appropriate upon reentry.

One reason for the waivers is the process for releasing youth offenders without determinate sentences. These indeterminate sentenced youth have a statutory process to go before a release review panel when their initial minimum period of confinement expires. The youth are released to

parole unless the Release Review Panel finds by clear and convincing evidence that the youth is in need of additional rehabilitation and TJJD facilities are the most suitable place for that rehabilitation. If youth have pending treatment needs, such as substance use services, that can be met in the community, the youth's treatment requirements may be waived in lieu of community options. This determination can also be made prior to youth being up for review by the Release Review Panel if the youth's treatment team determines the youth can safely engage in this treatment in the community and otherwise be eligible for release. In making individualized treatment decisions for youth, TJJD may waive certain requirements. Documentation needs to improve, and TJJD leadership continues to monitor these corrective actions.

TJJD will continue to work directly with the OIO to address issues identified and concerns raised regarding the rights of the youth committed to the department.