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TYC Response to BJS “Sexual Victimization in Juvenile Facilities” Report

The U.S. Department of Justice’s Bureau of Justice Statistics (BJS) today released its “Sexual Victimization in Juvenile Facilities Reported by Youth, 2009” report. The report identifies two Texas Youth Commission (TYC) facilities, Corsicana Residential Treatment Center and Victory Field Correctional Academy in Vernon, as “facilities with high rates of sexual victimization.” The report also identifies one facility, the McLennan County State Juvenile Correctional Facility Unit 1 in Mart, as a “facility with a low rate of sexual victimization.”

Data for this report was anonymously self-reported by youth to BJS and gathered in mid-2008. TYC opened all of its campuses to the BJS and had the highest participation rate of any state. TYC administrators believed this data would provide another layer of transparency in the agency’s ongoing reform efforts. TYC has been recognized by the BJS staff as providing leadership not only through its full participation in the National Survey of Youth in Custody, but also through its reform and efforts to achieve compliance with draft standards of the National Prison Rape Elimination Commission.

As noted in the report, the youth survey does not permit any follow-up investigation or substantiation and some allegations may be untrue. Data from the TYC’s Office of Inspector General (OIG) indicates that during the time period identified in the BJS report, the Corsicana State School had 21 allegations of sexual misconduct reported to the OIG, one of which resulted in an adjudication. Victory Field had two allegations during that period, and both cases remain open.

Approximately 40 percent of TYC youth have documented histories of abuse and neglect prior to arriving at TYC. As the report notes, youth who had experienced any prior sexual assault were more than twice as likely to report sexual victimization compared to those with no sexual assault history. While the agency focuses on the behavior for which the child was adjudicated, great emphasis is also given to address the previous trauma suffered by the youth.

Numerous reforms have been initiated since June 2007 to ensure the safety of youth in TYC.

- Nearly 13,500 cameras and video recording technology have been put in place, allowing the agency and the Office of Inspector General to examine the times and locations where incidents are alleged to occur.
- Hotlines going directly to the OIG are operational in every dorm, giving youth and staff immediate access to report sexual misconduct.
- Full-time law enforcement investigators are on TYC campuses to immediately intervene and secure evidence for possible prosecution.
- New assessment methodologies have been implemented to identify youth who are most at risk of being victimized by sexual misconduct, as well as those youth who are at greatest risk to be sexual predators.
- Dorm and programming assignments are made accordingly.
- TYC staff are better trained to identify behaviors indicative of sexual misconduct.

The TYC Board and management have a Zero Tolerance policy on sexual misconduct of any type. The safety and security of youth and staff is a primary objective of the agency. The OIG vigorously investigates each allegation. While the overwhelming majority of these allegations are withdrawn or unsubstantiated by investigation, TYC treats each report with great seriousness. The agency is committed to preventing any form of sexual misconduct, investigating all allegations of such action, and holding any individual, whether youth or staff, accountable for their actions.

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