

**Written Testimony
Of
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**Submitted to:
Juvenile Justice Hearing
Of
Review Panel on Prison Rape
U.S. Department of Justice**

May 25, 2010

Distinguished Members of the Review Panel on Prison Rape and advisors to the panel, I am pleased to have the opportunity to present this testimony to you regarding the Texas Youth Commission and, specifically, the Corsicana Residential Treatment Center. I appreciate your service on the Review Panel and the professional way in which your work has been conducted to date. I regret that I am unable to appear before you personally, but am confident that the Texas Youth Commission officials who will appear before you on June 4, 2010 will be able to answer your questions. I will participate in the hearing by telephone.

I was appointed the Executive Director of the Texas Youth Commission by its third conservator, Richard Nedelkoff, effective October 1, 2008. Two weeks later when the agency was removed from conservatorship, I was appointed Executive Commissioner of the agency by Governor Perry. Most recently, I was appointed the Executive Director of the Texas Youth Commission by the appointed governing board on September 1, 2009. During the nineteen months that I have been in a leadership position with this agency, my primary responsibility has been to lead a reform effort that insures the protection of youth and staff and moves the agency through a transformation that produces stability in operations and better outcomes with youth as they re-enter communities throughout Texas.

The mission of the Texas Youth Commission as the state's juvenile corrections agency is to promote public safety by operating juvenile correctional facilities and by partnering with youth, families, and communities to provide a safe and secure environment where youth in the agency's care and custody receive individualized education, treatment, life skills and employment training and positive role models to facilitate successful community reintegration. A very significant part of our reform effort has focused on providing safe and secure environments, implementing a rehabilitation strategy that individualizes skill development and treatment as well as engages families, developing and implementing a comprehensive education program that meets the needs of our youth and insuring that our specialized treatment services are consistent with best and evidence-based practices and models. We are currently implementing a comprehensive re-entry program throughout the state. Through the reform period from 2007 to present, we have reduced the number of youth served in residential care by 60%. Since October 1, 2008, we have eliminated over 1100 FTE positions.

It is my hope that you will see evidence of our reform efforts in the documentation that was provided to the Review Panel, through your visit to the Corsicana Residential Treatment Center, and through our response to your questions. As I communicated to TYC employees in January 2010 following the issuance of the report, *Sexual Victimization in Juvenile Facilities Reported by Youth, 2008-09*, we have implemented a great number of safety reforms since the time the reports

were completed in TYC facilities. However, we are not assuming that we have done everything we need to do to prevent sexual misconduct or that every reform is working as intended. Our agency has a zero tolerance policy and that is our practice-past, present and future.

Approximately 75% of the youth committed to the TYC by juvenile courts throughout our state have one or more identified specialized treatment needs. A significant number of youth, 37%, are identified as having a serious mental health problem. These special needs are complicated by documented histories of abuse and neglect, family members with mental impairments, prior out of home placements, violent behavior and special education needs. The Corsicana Residential Treatment Center is our primary placement for the youth who have the most severe mental health problems and who require stabilization as well as ongoing specialized treatment.

Due to the unique youth population that we are serving at Corsicana Residential Treatment Center, we have taken the following steps, in addition to those already reported, to insure their safety:

1. Strengthened treatment and education programming;
2. Increased professional development for all staff (clinical, case management, education and supervision);
3. Implemented "Seeking Safety" curriculum; and
4. Sealed bathroom doors that are not in use.

We are in the process of completing the following steps:

1. Completing individual youth interviews regarding sexual safety;
2. Increasing supervision ratios during evening shift and weekend awake shifts to 1:4 to be completed by September 1, 2010;
3. Installing cameras that are being redeployed from facilities that are being closed to multiple sleeping rooms and other vulnerable areas to be completed by November 1, 2010 and
4. Developing training specific to boundaries and relationships, particularly for female staff.


We have also entered into an agreement with The Moss Group. The purpose of this agreement is to conduct a systemic review of the TYC, focusing on the effectiveness of strategies the agency has put in place to eliminate sexual abuse in all TYC facilities. This includes but is not limited to the Corsicana Residential Treatment Center. The focus of this review is to objectively assess the strengths, challenges, and opportunities that currently represent the Commission's reform efforts in addressing the sexual safety of youth. The review will be able to identify both positive outcomes/reforms and strengths as well as assist us in establishing a clear direction for additional improvements in the future. I believe that you are familiar with the work of The Moss Group and its President, Andie Moss. Ms. Moss is directing the work with TYC. The work is being managed by

The Moss Group Senior Associate Shaina Vanek and nine consultants will round out the team.

There are seven tasks that are included in the review of our agency by The Moss Group. The first task is a review of written documentation for an even more comprehensive time period than included in the documentation requested by the Review Panel. A facilitated meeting with the TYC executive team has been completed. On-site facility visits and assessments are currently underway. The assessment of the Corsicana Residential Treatment Facility has just been completed, and we are reviewing specific feedback on this facility for corrective action. Each facility visit includes both assessment and technical assistance. The other planned action steps are a review of a TYC staff survey, interviews with stakeholders, volunteers and advocates, data analysis and executive debriefing of findings. The final report of The Moss Group is scheduled for presentation to the TYC Board in November 2010.

The TYC Board and all TYC staff are singularly dedicated to the mission of the agency and especially to the safety of TYC youth. We understand that it is everyone's responsibility to keep our youth safe. We also acknowledge that while we have taken many steps and had many "lessons learned" over the last three years, there is an opportunity to learn from others. We welcome the opportunity to learn from both the successes and the challenges of other juvenile facilities that will be provided through the work of the Review Panel.

Respectfully submitted,


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