

TEXAS CRIMINAL JUSTICE COALITION
PRIORITY RECOMMENDATION FOR THE SUNSET ADVISORY COMMISSION

REHABILITATION FOR YOUTH IN TDCJ

INTENT – Strengthen rehabilitative programming for youth incarcerated in adult facilities.

The Texas Department of Criminal Justice (TDCJ) should improve efforts to provide youth-centered programming for adolescents being housed in adult correctional facilities, and re-allocate resources where necessary to implement strengthened programming. Efforts should also be made to ensure that any programming made available to youth is age-appropriate and tailored to youths' specialized needs.

BACKGROUND

Limited programming for youth housed in TDCJ impedes the provision of necessary rehabilitative treatment. This is due in part to the small population of youth housed in TDCJ: youth comprise only one-tenth of one percent of TDCJ's entire population,¹ causing structural inefficiencies and challenges in the agency's provision of adequate programming for this subset of incarcerated individuals. Yet, youth incarcerated in TDCJ are roughly identical to youth housed by the Texas Juvenile Justice Department – both in offense type and in the level of violence involved in their offense.²

As such, **TDCJ must make efforts to improve rehabilitation programming and services for youth, in line with best practices for youth programming.** The TDCJ Internal Audit Division has already recommended the implementation of specialized programming for youth to assist in their cognitive development; likewise, it has recommended greater oversight of youth programming, noting that program practices deviate significantly from policy.³ One program currently available in the Youthful Offender Program at TDCJ is the Challenge, Opportunity, Understanding, Respect, Acceptance, Growth and Education (COURAGE) program, which focuses on “basic skills and values building and incorporates an individual strategy for each offender.”⁴ But again, TDCJ's current structural problems have reduced oversight, implementation, and outcomes for youth-centered programs, such as the COURAGE program, leaving youth significantly under-treated. TDCJ must provide programming to youth in an age-appropriate setting that addresses the root causes of criminal behavior, which will strengthen their chances of success on reentry.

REFERENCES

¹ TDCJ, *Statistical Report*, p. 20.

² Michele Deitch, *Juveniles in the Adult Criminal Justice System in Texas*.

³ TDCJ Internal Audit Division, “A Report on Rehabilitation Programs Division's COURAGE Program for Youthful Offenders,” Audit 0921, 26 October 2009, pp. 1-2. (This 2009 audit is the most recent audit of the program. The Internal Audit Division noted in conversation that they will likely not audit the program again for five to ten years due to the program's small size. This suggests oversight for programs for youth in TDCJ is a structural problem. A recent small-scale riot among youth in the Clemens Unit also suggests a need for greater oversight.)

⁴ TDCJ, Rehabilitation Programs Division: COURAGE Program for Youthful Offenders, available at http://www.tdcj.state.tx.us/divisions/rpd/rpd_courage.html.