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Texas Youth Commission
Legislative Appropriations Request, FY 2012-2013

ENSURE YOUTH NEEDS ARE ADDRESSED

BACKGROUND

Despite Texas' budget shortfall, we must strive for safe communities and successful juvenile justice interventions. Specifically, our decision-makers must maximize opportunities for youth to become productive, law-abiding adults – including through increased resources for education and vocation-based programming, treatment for substance abuse and mental health problems, and pathways for successful re-entry.

On the other hand, programmatic cuts made to TYC that will directly impact the quality of service and program delivery for youth will cost the state significantly more in the long run. Improving the lives of our youth now will strengthen communities and result in long-term economic and public safety benefits for Texans.

RECOMMENDATIONS

In order to strengthen the agency's capacity to meet the current educational, vocational, and treatment needs of confined youth, TCJC supports the funding of the following exceptional items:

➤ **Strengthen Special Educational Services**

Youth at TYC are in dire need of specialized programming, specifically special education services. In fact, approximately 40% of those in confinement qualify for special education courses. At the very least, TYC's special education services must be comparable to those provided by public schools to better serve their needs and to work towards improving significant learning deficiencies. For example, TYC lacks a sufficient number of teachers and dedicated aides to support both regular instruction and specialized services. For this reason TCJC supports TYC's first exceptional item.

➤ **Maintain Workforce and Vocational Programs**

The lack of a comprehensive re-entry infrastructure for youth increases their likelihood of recidivating. As such, the state must invest in practices that help youth succeed after juvenile justice involvement. Educational services (including reading and behavior improvement programs, among others) that support workforce and vocational development are especially critical to easing the re-integration of youth into their home communities. For this reason TCJC supports TYC's second exceptional item.

➤ **Expand Resources for Proven Re-entry Programs**

TYC must be given the resources to continue to improve family and community involvement in parole through the implementation Functional Family Therapy (FFT) and Multi-systemic Therapy (MST). FFT is an empirically grounded and highly successful family intervention for at-risk and juvenile justice involved youth. MST is a research-proven and cost-effective treatment for youth with serious behavioral problems. The Washington State Institute for Public Policy found that both of these programs saved money and reduced crime. For this reason TCJC supports TYC's third exceptional item.

➤ **Solutions to the Budget Cuts**

Instead of harmful budgetary cuts to critical juvenile justice programs, the Legislature must take advantage of the Rainy Day Fund, which could provide over \$9 billion for the 2012-2013 state budget. Additionally, policy-makers must maximize the use of available federal funding, including any additional stimulus aid or new matching funds made available by health care reform. Finally, the Legislature must create new sources of revenue that are equitable and can grow with the need for youth and other key services, including through cost savings from the elimination of unproductive tax breaks.

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Thank you for allowing me the opportunity to present testimony on TYC's legislative appropriations request. We know that you have a difficult job ahead of you, but we trust that you will bear in mind the needs of youth who must rely on the state for their care.