



Mental Health Care in the Juvenile Justice System in Texas

October 2022

Texas Advisory Committee to the U.S. Commission on Civil Rights

Members of the Texas Advisory Committee to the U.S. Commission on Civil Rights have seen several recent news stories highlighting abuse and mistreatment within the Texas Juvenile Justice system.

In response to these news reports, the Committee has heard and will continue hearing expert testimony from individuals, organizations, and professionals with specific and intimate knowledge of the conditions and challenges, especially with respect to mental health disparities and denial of the civil rights of those confined within these facilities.

The Committee has taken testimony from family members and advocates for those confined in Texas Juvenile Justice Department (TJJD) facilities who, because of the inability to receive mental healthcare, have resorted to self-harm. Others have expressed reluctance to file formal grievances with the ombudsmen because of fear of retaliation or simply not having their grievances addressed. There are also complaints surrounding TJJD's denial of church services.

Those testimonies have raised several concerns about: (1) access to mental health resources for youth confined in TJJD facilities; (2) the ability for them to report abuse, mistreatment, and denial of rights in a safe, private manner and without fear of repercussion; (3) and the overall state and effectiveness of these facilities in their current form.

After the completion of our fact-finding period, the Committee's goal is to produce a report identifying specific issues, along with recommendations for addressing the problems.

In the meantime, the Committee urges Texas Governor Greg Abbott, Lt. Gov. Dan Patrick, Speaker Dade Phelan, and members of the Texas Legislature tasked with oversight of state facilities, to move expeditiously in identifying the issues within the Texas Juvenile Justice system and resolve them in a manner that protects the rights of those in state custody. The Committee hopes that by enacting the appropriate reforms, those currently facing issues within Texas' facilities will see relief, and Texas could become a model for other state juvenile justice systems.

The U.S. Commission on Civil Rights is an independent, bipartisan agency of the federal government charged with studying discrimination or denial of equal protection of the laws because of race, color, religion, sex, age, disability, national origin, or in the administration of justice.

**Texas Advisory Committee to the
U.S. Commission on Civil Rights**

September 2021 – September 2025

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