



NEWS Bulletin

TSEU/TYC Caucus leaders and activists put forward union agenda for TYC

Union members in TYC met in Austin on January 26th to discuss the direction of the agency and what sort of youth rehabilitation system TSEU should be putting forward. With everyone from politicians to administrators to the media weighing in on what TYC should look like, it's critical that the voices of dedicated, front-line workers be heard. This is our vision. Now, we must organize and mobilize to make sure the legislature & the agency administration hears it.

We, the TYC Caucus of TSEU, believe in the mission of our agency to rehabilitate youth and provide them with the tools to be successful in society. The primary mission of the Texas Youth Commission is to function as a rehabilitation agency for the most troubled youthful offenders. At the same time, TYC must provide a secure placement for youth whose behavior would otherwise present a danger to people in their communities. TYC must be a unified, statewide resource for local authorities in cases where local resources cannot provide adequate or appropriate services to specific youth who have entered the law enforcement system. TYC must provide a safe, focused, and supportive environment that gives

these youth the best possible opportunities to return to their communities while meeting the public safety needs of those communities. In order to achieve this, TYC must be able to provide a range of programs that integrates community and family support into the process and is suited for a variety of troubled offenders with an assortment of individual needs. This cannot happen without sufficient funding and resources, adequate staffing levels, a fair and consistent grievance procedure, attractive pay and employee benefits, and adequate training. Only then can TYC ensure the success of any rehabilitation program and the safety of offenders and agency employees alike.

- *TSEU's Goals for TYC listed on back* -

WHAT TO DO NOW:

1. Build the movement to stand up for quality services and good state jobs. Join TSEU and sign up your co-workers today.
2. Join COPE. We must have the political muscle to win in the legislature.
3. Call your legislators and share this vision of TYC with them.

1. Funding and staffing must be based on a level of service that will enable the agency to accomplish its mission of protecting the public, preventing delinquency, rehabilitating youth and re-establishing them in society as productive and responsible citizens. To achieve that, TYC must reach a 1:8 staffing ratio of JCO's to youth at all times.
 2. The agency must strive to provide a safe environment for its employees and for the youth. Resources should be available for staff to deal with any situation that arises. Properly staffed facilities, with properly trained JCO's, should not have to resort to the use of chemical restraints. The agency's move to allow the use of pepper spray on youth was a stopgap measure intended to curb the high rate of injury for staff and youth alike. However, with 1:8 ratios and proper training chemical restraints would be a last resort for an emergency situation in a well-run youth system.
 3. Truly recognizing that staff is the agency's most valuable resource in accomplishing its mission, the agency must welcome their input, encourage team work and reward their contributions and dedication. The proposals, solutions, and ideas put forward by the JCO's, case managers, teachers, and support staff working the front lines of TYC should be integrated into the decision making process. Their years of experience and dedication to the agency make them an invaluable resource in developing any new TYC policies. The at-will employment status recently instituted by the state legislature undermines this principle. An honest discourse between front line staff and agency leadership cannot occur when employees may be fired at any time for any reason or no reason at all.
 4. Quality programs, educational opportunities and training must be provided to maximize success of youth upon returning to the community. This should include but not be limited to: substance abuse education and programs, psychological assessments, services and therapy, special education, vocational training, and resocialization programs. This cannot be implemented without competitive salaries and benefits to attract and retain qualified rehabilitation staff. In addition, the number of Case Managers, Teachers, and Psychologists at every TYC facility must be increased, and they must be given the training and resources they need to accomplish their mission.
 5. The agency must provide a spectrum of housing options from high security facilities to minimum-security halfway houses to parole supervision depending on the responsibility and risk level of the youth. This continuum of care should include but not be limited to three critical steps:
 1. The larger TYC facilities where youth can be assessed for their specific needs and be introduced to their individual rehabilitation programs. These larger facilities should serve as short-term, intensive introductions to a longer-term, multi-layered rehabilitation program designed around the specific needs of youth.
 2. Community based homes around the state where, if appropriate, youth can be placed near their homes in order to draw on family and community support in the rehabilitation process. TYC must transition to a focus on the smaller, community based facility where more intensive rehabilitation for youth can occur. By building more halfway houses around the state the agency can better achieve its mission of reintegrating delinquent youth back into their communities. The halfway houses must be more than just a pit stop for youths about to be released back into society. They must be a way to bring family and community support into the rehabilitation process. The greater proportion of youth's time in TYC must be spent in a more closely monitored environment where greater community support and more intensive rehabilitation can occur.
 3. Careful monitoring by TYC Parole after their release with the option to return the youth to any point in the continuum of care as needed.
 6. The system should be operated by the state, fully integrated and flexible, and publicly accountable. The privatization of youth rehabilitation in Texas must be stopped. When companies take charge of delinquent youth, seeking to make a profit, it is the youth that suffer. By making all of Texas' youth rehabilitation facilities completely state-operated, TYC can ensure a greater amount of public accountability, uniformity of policies and procedures, and a unified system around the state.
 7. The system must be able to attract, train, and retain qualified and dedicated employees by providing decent benefits including good pay, quality health care, fair working conditions, reasonable job security, and the right to organize. TYC's failings in these areas are made clear by the high turnover rate and inability to attract qualified staff to fill open positions. At-will status for TYC staff must be reversed, pay levels for every job title must be increased, and a fair grievance procedure must be uniformly enforced at every TYC facility. Grievants must have access to truly independent mediators unaffiliated with the agency. The agency must have transparent procedures in place to protect good employees and deal appropriately with performance or behavior that is not consistent with its mission.
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