



NEWS Bulletin

Our Agency Under Attack

Union activists meet with Griffiths, discuss closures and future of TJJD

On August 15th, TSEU union leaders and activists Cora Bennett (MART), Mary Henry (Giddings), Seth Hutchinson (TSEU Vice President), and Harrison Hiner (TSEU Political Organizer) met with TJJD Executive Director Mike Griffiths to discuss the agency's proposed plan to close one secure facility and two halfway houses. The agency was forced to draw up the closure plan after the State Legislature mandated that one of the agency's six remaining large facilities be shut down. They also slashed an additional \$23 million from TJJD's budget, which forced the closure of Beto House in McAllen and Turman House in Austin. These moves come after the legislature has already closed six facilities and eliminated close to 2,000 positions from the agency since 2006. The trend has been clear, state lawmakers are trying to walk away entirely from the state's obligation to protect public safety by incarcerating and rehabilitating juvenile offenders.

At the meeting with Griffiths, the union delegation discussed the closure plan, the agency's recent moves to expand the use of contract facilities, the agency's grievance procedure, the plans to implement shift differential pay, and issues facing case managers in documenting their work and handling such large caseloads. Griffiths confirmed that the agency is still proposing to close Corsicana, but that the final decision would not be made until the August 30th TJJD Board Meeting. TSEU members at the meeting pressed Griffiths that there was a lot of confusion on the ground with front-line staff, and that people weren't being communicated with and were worried about their jobs and the future of the agency. Union members also pushed that there should be recognition of seniority for any displaced staff from a closed facility who wanted to apply for a position in another facility.

The TSEU delegation also expressed concern that the closure of the two halfway houses was moving the agency in the wrong direction, since halfway houses are safer for both staff and youth

and provide a more intense focus on rehabilitation. Another area of great concern for union members was the increased use of contract facilities for youths committed to TJJD, particularly with G4S and Cornerstone. Union members pointed out that the agency had a terrible track record dealing with private contractors (like the Coke County and Eagle Lake facilities) and shouldn't start down that path again. Mr. Griffiths was open with the delegation that TJJD leadership was under enormous pressure from lawmakers to make drastic changes. The implication from lawmakers is that when the Legislature meets again in 2015 they may decide to close down even more facilities.

For TSEU, the fight couldn't be clearer: lawmakers want to wash their hands of TJJD and the kids under its supervision. We, the frontline staff of the agency, have to organize and build our strength to stop these attacks, otherwise our agency may be gone in just a few years. We know the youths in TJJD have serious problems, and for many of them county government programs are not suited to meet their needs, just as TDCJ is not appropriate for them either. TJJD needs to exist to protect the public safety of Texas by giving the worst juvenile offenders a chance to succeed in life before they end up in prison.

WHAT TO DO NOW:

1. Join the Union! If you're already a member of TSEU, ask a coworker to join.
2. Join COPE, our union's Political Action Fund. We have to grow our political muscle if we are going to move elected officials to our side.
3. Share this News Bulletin with your coworkers. We have to get the word out that this fight is not over.