

TEXAS CRIMINAL JUSTICE COALITION
PRIORITY RECOMMENDATION FOR THE SUNSET ADVISORY COMMISSION

QUALIFICATIONS FOR STAFF SUPERVISING YOUTH IN TDCJ

INTENT – Improve staffing qualifications for correctional officers responsible for supervising youth within the Texas Department of Criminal Justice (TDCJ).

TDCJ should amend staff qualifications for new hires who will be responsible for supervising youth. Specifically, staff should possess the following skills:

- An ability to work with youth in an empathetic and understanding manner.
- An ability to foster the cooperation of youth in the treatment process.
- An ability to communicate effectively with youth and to explain the progress of the youth to family members and other treatment staff.
- An introductory knowledge of child development and the role of the family.
- An introductory knowledge of the causes of juvenile delinquency and current methods of juvenile offender treatment.
- An introductory knowledge of the general techniques of communicating with and counseling adolescents.¹

The curriculum for current staff training also should be frequently reviewed to ensure the provision of quality, age-appropriate treatment and services for youth.

BACKGROUND

Interacting with and managing incarcerated youth can prove challenging. Adolescents' ongoing developmental and physical changes can present multiple obstacles to treatment. **It is imperative that staff persons working with this population are highly skilled and trained in managing, interacting with, and supervising youth.** Unfortunately, this is not typically the case for correctional officers hired by TDCJ. Staff who supervise youth in the adult system are hired based on their ability to handle interactions with other adults.² This can lead to a number of counterproductive and unnecessarily punitive consequences, such as the use of isolation as a response to misbehavior, or the denial of treatment and services. Youth-focused staff qualifications will better equip TDCJ staff to address the needs of youth under their supervision, thus producing better outcomes.

REFERENCES

¹ Texas Juvenile Justice Department Juvenile Correctional Officer Job Description, available at http://austin.tyc.state.tx.us/CfInternet/job_posting/jco_I-IV.html#elig.

² Texas Department of Criminal Justice Position Description: Correctional Officer, available at <http://www.tdcj.state.tx.us/vacancy/pd/033203.pdf>.