

Tarrant County Juvenile Services

Prison Rape Elimination Act

2015 Annual Report

In 2003, President George Bush signed the Prison Rape Elimination Act (PREA) into law. The Department of Justice (DOJ) developed national standards for implementation by federal, state, and local correctional organizations. The intended purpose of these standards was to provide comprehensive guidelines for preventing, detecting and eliminating incidents of sexual abuse harassment involving adult inmates and youth in detention and residential facilities. After public review and comment, the DOJ published final PREA Juvenile Facility standards which became effective August 20, 2012.

Tarrant County Juvenile Services has a zero tolerance policy for all acts of sexual abuse and harassment. The department has established the Elimination and Reporting of Sexual Abuse and Harassment Policy and Procedures pursuant to the PREA Juvenile Facility Standards, to prohibit and prevent sexual abuse and harassment and to detect, report, investigate, and address any allegation of abuse or harassment involving youth in the custody of the department and its contracted residential providers.

The department is committed to providing a safe and secure environment for youth in our care. Prior to PREA, the department has had a long history of proactive policy and procedures, training for employees and providing information to youth on measures to keep them safe, and methods to report sexual misconduct and abuse. Extensive measures are taken to comprehensively investigate all reported allegations of sexual abuse and harassment. Allegations are reported to the Texas Juvenile Justice Department, Tarrant County Sheriff Department and an internal investigation is conducted.

The Lynn W. Ross detention facility is scheduled to be audited April 4-7, 2016. The department has been striving to meet PREA compliance. Some of the accomplishments that occurred during 2015 were:

- ❖ Designated an agency-wide PREA Coordinator with authority to develop, implement, and oversee agency efforts to comply with the PREA standards.
- ❖ Ensure PREA standards are strictly followed in the hiring and promotion of all employees
- ❖ Ensure the majority of department employees, contractors, volunteers and interns have been trained in the requirements of PREA.
- ❖ Conducted training in the area of LGBTQI population.
- ❖ Developed Staffing Plan that adheres to PREA staffing requirements.
- ❖ Conducted First Responder Training.
- ❖ Partnered with community agencies to provide residents outside victim advocates and additional emotional support related to sexual abuse and harassment
- ❖ Enhanced electronic surveillance system to protect residents from sexual abuse
- ❖ Ensured designated employees receive specialized training in conducting sexual abuse investigations in confined settings

- ❖ Revised the behavioral screening tool used at intake. Conducted training for all detention intake staff on how to appropriately ask questions regarding gender identity and sexual orientation
- ❖ Ensured Medical and Mental Health Staff received specialized training in detecting and assessing signs of sexual abuse and harassment, preserving physical evidence of sexual abuse, and responding professionally to victims of sexual abuse and harassment.
- ❖ Revised department operational policies and procedures to achieve compliance with PREA standards. Approved by the Juvenile Board in October 2015.
- ❖ Implementation of unannounced rounds of the detention facility by intermediate-level or higher level supervisory staff to deter sexual abuse and sexual harassment.

The Lynn W. Ross detention facility continues its efforts to achieve full compliance with the PREA standards and ensure that residents are safe from sexual abuse and sexual harassment. There were no allegations of sexual abuse or harassment in 2014 or 2015. We look forward to our facility audit in April and to posting our final report.

Ron Lewis
Deputy Assistant Director