



Georgia Department of Juvenile Justice

Testimony to the Prison Rape Elimination Act (PREA) Panel

Avery D. Niles, Commissioner

Distinguished Members of the Review Panel on Prison Rape and advisors to the panel, I am pleased to have the opportunity to present this testimony to you regarding the Georgia Department of Juvenile Justice. I appreciate your service on the Review Panel and the professional way in which your work has been conducted.

The Georgia Department of Juvenile Justice (DJJ) provides secure housing, programming, mental health services, health care services, and education for juveniles who are on probation, awaiting adjudication, or have been adjudicated and committed to the GA Department of Juvenile Justice. To accomplish this mission, GA DJJ houses approximately 1,800 juveniles in 28 short and long term secure facilities across the state. The Georgia Juvenile Justice system also operates 92 court services offices to supervise approximately 15,000 youths on probation, while contracting with 77 community residential providers.

The Bureau of Justice Statistics (BJS) report regarding 17 of our facilities high-lighted two facilities as having the highest rates of sexual victimization in the nation. These facilities, Eastman Youth Development Campus and Paulding Regional Youth Detention Center, are represented today. Further, we appreciate the efforts of Dr. Beck and his group and we have learned from the information and have greatly improved our systems as a result.

Paulding Regional Youth Detention Center is a short-term facility operated by Youth Services International (YSI). Paulding has a capacity of 100 beds for male youth. Eastman Youth Development Campus is a long-term facility operated by the State of Georgia. Eastman has a capacity of 256 beds and houses older males but functionally limits the population to 200 youth.

Prior to the release of the 2013 report published by the BJS, an effort to greatly enhance the services that DJJ provides to youth and to reduce incidents of violence or sexual victimization was already underway most notably beginning in July 2011 when DJJ applied for the PREA "Zero Tolerance" grant, which we were awarded. Through this grant opportunity, we utilized The Moss Group to assist in several different areas regarding our PREA readiness. Some of the more significant work includes the following:

November 2011 thru February 2012, DJJ created the Safety and Security Task Force which made unannounced inspections of all 28 facilities for security issues with an emphasis placed on PREA vulnerabilities.

The Task Force specifically addressed the following PREA security issues:

- Blind spots
- CCTV placement and operability
- Deficiencies in locking mechanisms and key control
- Officer positioning and officer to youth ratios

March 2012, the DJJ hired the first statewide PREA Coordinator, and the PREA Oversight Committee was formed. The committee initially ensured that processes were developed based on the Department of Justice draft standards. The Coordinator/Committee focused on the following:

- All contracts with public and private agencies who housed youths were amended to include the legal obligation to comply with PREA standards.
- All facilities and community offices appointed a PREA Compliance Officer, who ensured PREA compliance at their respective facility/office.
- Georgia's DJJ PREA Webpage was developed and implemented to keep both staff and the public aware of the department's efforts to comply with PREA.
- Office doors, shower areas, and locking mechanisms were redesigned or corrected to ensure proper monitoring and safety. PREA-specific shower curtains were added that allowed youth privacy but ensured proper monitoring for safety.
- A stand-alone PREA policy was developed, authorized and released agency-wide. The PREA National Standards were integrated into more than 50 pre-existing GA DJJ polices.
- Youth Information/Education materials were developed. These include guidelines, pamphlets, and posters in both English and Spanish. These materials were placed in youth areas in both facilities and community offices.
- The web-based DJJ TIP Line was created to enhance outside reporting by parents and advocates of any abuses to include sexual abuse of youth within our care.

Efforts to enhance specialized services for youth have been implemented that include:

- The Medical and Mental Health Screenings were modified to include the required PREA information.
- Youth Educational Sessions were conducted with all youth. These sessions included the required PREA information including the enhanced reporting procedures.

- Each facility entered into memoranda of understanding with community service providers and victim advocate services that are able to provide youth services related to sexual assault and abuse.

Staff Training has been enhanced, developed, and implemented that addresses specific PREA needs that include:

- The Investigations Unit participated in training that specialized in PREA-related incidents. This training was held in late 2011 and was in partnership with the GA Department of Corrections sponsored by the Moss Group.
- Medical Staff received specialized training in the areas of Forensic Nursing and Sexual Abuse Education and Prevention.
- Executive level and mid-level staff participated in a one-day PREA management course conducted by the Moss Group. All facility Directors participated as well.
- Agency Investigators participated in a 3-day course specializing in Interviews and Interrogations conducted by the Georgia Bureau of Investigation.
- As of February 2013, more than 6,500 Georgia Juvenile Justice staff members, volunteers, contractors, and interns completed DJJ's PREA online training based on their level of contact with DJJ youth.
- The GA DJJ implemented evidenced-based training for staff who dealt with sexually abused children. This was done in partnership with the Governor's Office for Children and Families' and the Georgia Center for Child Advocacy.

Other concentrated efforts include:

- The Moss Group conducted Sexual Safety Assessments in five facilities that included facility strengths, reporting culture, and training.
- The Moss Group also conducted interviews with executive level staff as well as other key management positions assessing the overall understanding and support of the PREA initiative.
- Key executive/management staff participated in the Southeastern PREA Leadership Summit hosted by the Louisiana DJJ.
- PREA goals were included in the Georgia Department of Juvenile Justice's Fiscal Years 2013 -2016 Strategic Plan to ensure budget commitments and annual allocations of staff.

- Based on the survey findings, a special DJJ PREA Advisory Committee reviewed all PREA investigative case files. **NOTE:** The findings revealed that DJJ did not have a strong reporting culture during the DOJ Survey period, January 1, 2011 through December 31, 2011.
- A revamp of the investigations protocol was implemented. This aligned our investigatory efforts with the current PREA Standards to include using the specific PREA definitions for tracking purposes.

Our way ahead to further success:

- DJJ has just received a second PREA grant. The agency will focus the efforts related to this grant on youth reporting to an outside entity and gender responsive training for all staff.
- The GA DJJ is developing PREA-specific curriculum. The PREA curriculum model is comprised of several sets of resources, tailored to the duration of a youth's confinement. This curriculum focuses on:
 - Providing insight and support to youth who enter the system with vulnerabilities from past experiences of trauma, abuse, or victimization, including guidance in reducing the risk from such experiences.
 - Reduces the youth's risk of being a target or a victim of any kind of sexual assault while in our custody.
 - Expands the awareness of all youth of the range of predatory and sexual acting out behaviors, including bullying, sexual labeling, and name calling.
- Incorporating a telephone reporting system that will report to a third party organization that we will contract for implementation during our FY 2014 Budget.
- Pursuing opportunities to incorporate a kiosk reporting system in the dayrooms of our secure facilities that will allow the youth the opportunity to report allegations of a sexual nature, along with other issues, in an anonymous manner.
- The agency is looking to move forward in 2014 with gender responsive training for staff and youth as we realize that we have a high number of female staff working directly with our male youth.
- We will also incorporate more training for staff that is gender specific as we realize that pathways for boys and girls differ.

Since the 2013 published report, the agency is moving forward with additional significant changes, efforts and strategies in an effort to continue to reduce incidents of violence or sexual victimization. We have no greater responsibility than to first ensure that we do no harm, and secondly that we ensure the safety of youth and staff in our facilities.

The State of Georgia is committed to working with our federal partners to reduce and eliminate sexual violence in our facilities. We will work diligently with federal and private expertise to obtain resources and technical assistance. We will continue all of our efforts to develop and implement “best practices” programs to improve the level of safety of youth while in confinement and enhance services for the youth in our care.

Thank you for your time and the opportunity to testify.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Avery D. Niles". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large, sweeping initial "A".

Avery D. Niles, Commissioner
Georgia Department of Juvenile Justice