



Testimony to Chairman Parker and the House Corrections Committee for HB 1543

Wednesday, March 13, 2013

Pete Garanzuay, TNOYS Youth Advocate

Good afternoon, Chairman and committee members. Let me just say thank you for giving me a chance to express my opinion.

My name is Pete Garanzuay. I'm a Youth Advocate for TNOYS. I've also experienced some time in juvenile detention here in Austin.

I'm here to support House Bill 1543, and I have some experiences I'd like to share about why I think youth in county detention need an ombudsman.

From the ages of 12-16, I've seen fights happen that could have been prevented or handled differently. Staff at the juvenile detention facility I was placed in would provoke juveniles and egg on situations that obviously should have been stopped right away. (With who would win and "ohhhhh," kind of remarks.) There were blind spots, like in the gym area or weight room, between doors, where people could go unnoticed. And there were not enough staff.

There was also a level system. When you are at level 1, there is no contact, to TV or games. At level 2 there is an 8:00 bedtime. At level 3 there is a 9:00 bedtime. There were unfair consequences and staff used the level system as a threat for reasons other than the right reasons.

When it is convenient for the guards, they can keep you from participating in recreational activities. They can hold you in a cell and not unlock the door. Sometimes guards will not unlock doors according to the schedule and will go do what they want to do.

Prescription drugs are handed out whether you had a minor fight or a family death, even if you are only sad for moments. You can get diagnosed with bipolar, depression, etc. (A counselor, or just having someone there to talk to can help, besides the pills.) After you are diagnosed it is MANDATORY to take the pills, otherwise it is a probation violation.

HB 1543 would have an impact by giving juveniles the chance to call and share their problems. The ombudsman would be there to help find a solution.

This bill would no longer help me. For I have chosen a better path. But it would help youth in generations after me. This isn't something I've studied or made up. It's what I've experienced.

Thank you.