



**SUPPLEMENTAL REPORT OF THE
CHILD ADVOCATE
AND THE
ATTORNEY GENERAL**

**REGARDING THE
CONNECTICUT JUVENILE TRAINING SCHOOL**

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INTRODUCTION

On September 19, 2002 Child Advocate Jeanne Milstein and Attorney General Richard Blumenthal issued a joint report raising grave concerns with respect to the Connecticut Juvenile Training School ("CJTS"). The report resulted from an investigation having a primary purpose of assessing specific safety issues regarding youth, overall facility functioning, programming and services. Our conclusion was that DCF failed to properly plan for CJTS, failed to take proper steps to effectuate the opening of CJTS and failed to properly oversee the quality of services at CJTS, including education, safety and other services

Since that time we have been in regular communication with the Department of Children and Families concerning efforts to bring about productive change at CJTS. In addition, the Child Advocate has arranged for a monitor to spend considerable time observing and evaluating conditions at CJTS.

We continue to have very serious concerns about conditions at CJTS. Some youth have lived at CJTS since it opened in August 2001. Every day that goes by without correcting CJTS's problems is another day that those children are not receiving the care that they should receive. Five months of team building at CJTS following our prior report has not resulted in much productive change. Staff morale is still very low. Conditions at the facility are still very poor. It is time for DCF to move aggressively to implement strategies designed to promote meaningful change.

Accordingly, we are issuing this supplemental report summarizing the current status of all of the recommendations made in our previous report. For the reasons explained below we continue to have extremely serious concerns about CJTS. There does not appear to be any sense of urgency on the part of DCF to correct the numerous and critical problems at the facility. Our concerns are summarized below, following each of the original recommendations.

- 1. Proper protocols should be put in place for the assessment of risk of suicide and for suicide prevention in order to ensure that no child at the Connecticut Juvenile Training School is at risk for attempting or committing suicide.**

Our prior report emphasized that protocols for assessing risk of suicide and preventing suicide should be immediately reviewed and revised to ensure that proper steps are taken every step of the way. We noted that this should include a policy specifying when children should be seen by clinicians, what the clinical indicators are for the various types of safety watches or other interventions, how much time may pass between safety watch status and follow-up assessment, and when a referral for psychiatric evaluation should be made.

Very little has been done by DCF in response to this recommendation other than scheduling in-service training on suicide prevention to begin for all staff on January 21, 2003, nearly 1½ years after the facility opened. A proper policy is still not in place. Moreover, inappropriate security practices are still being observed, such as periodic failure to do room checks and permitting certain windows utilized to observe youth to be partially obscured.

Suicide prevention is a critically important issue. Steps should be taken immediately to fully implement this recommendation and ensure the safety of the children.

2. Connecticut Juvenile Training School policy and practice regarding the use of restraint and seclusion must immediately be brought into compliance with Connecticut law.

No meaningful action has been taken on this recommendation. We continue to have significant concerns about excessive use of restraints and restraint and seclusion being utilized at CJTS in violation of Connecticut law.

There should be a comprehensive assessment of the use of restraints and seclusion at CJTS. This should include a comprehensive review of facility policy (what restraints may be used, who may authorize them – under what circumstances and for what duration, how is the use of restraints documented and reviewed) as well as proper training and oversight of staff.

One illustrative example is that staff at CJTS appear to use “poseys” (a form of restraint made of soft material used to immobilize hands) with much greater frequency than comparable facilities in other states or even when compared with other secure facilities for youth in Connecticut administered by the Department of Corrections or by the Judicial Branch. Use of poseys, if at all, should be evaluated in light of the current state of the art concerning behavior management of troubled youth.

Another example is the use of handcuffs. There was a practice at CJTS of permitting Youth Services Officers (“YSOs”) at CJTS to bring in their own handcuffs. This practice was ended when it was brought to light by the Child Advocate and the Attorney General. The practice was replaced by all YSOs carrying CJTS issued handcuffs. Handcuffs are mechanical restraints. Like all restraints their use in CJTS is restricted by law. Conn. Gen. Stat. §46a-150.

Having all of the YSOs carry handcuffs at all times raises significant concerns about over utilization of restraints or unreported utilization of restraints contrary to applicable law. CJTS policy and practice needs to conform to the law and needs to ensure that if restraints are used at all they are done only as a last resort when properly justified and utilized under close supervision.

Serious consideration should be given to controlling the various types of restraints available at CJTS (i.e. poseys, mechanical restraint beds, leg shackles, handcuffs) in a manner requiring that they be logged out when they are utilized. This would ensure that all uses of restraints are documented. The absence of such basic controls at present makes it difficult to ensure proper accountability.

Restraint and seclusion should not be routine. They are a last resort to be utilized primarily in emergencies. In the absence of proper policy or facility practice, supervisors are not able to ensure that restraint or seclusion is only utilized in accordance with Connecticut law when appropriate and it is difficult if not impossible to review use of restraint or seclusion after the fact.

There has been virtually no progress on this issue. Policy and practice concerning restraint and seclusion at CJTS need to be corrected immediately.

3. All staff at all levels at the Connecticut Juvenile Training School should immediately receive training in their "mandatory reporter" obligations under Connecticut law.

Very little has taken place with regard to this recommendation. Mandatory reporter training for staff was supposed to begin during the week of January 21, 2003, nearly 1½ years after CJTS opened. In addition to this training it is critically important that DCF managers and supervisors continue to monitor what takes place at CJTS in order to ensure that any and all concerns about possible abuse or neglect are properly reported to the DCF Hotline.

4. The leadership of the Department of Children and Families should articulate a clear vision and mission for the Connecticut Juvenile Training School, and then enforce their expectations and rules.

It is essential that the Connecticut Juvenile Training School have a clear vision and mission that is understood and embraced by all. That was clearly not the case at CJTS over the past year and a half since the facility opened.

DCF is responsible for the administration and oversight of CJTS. One of the most basic tasks that should have been completed before CJTS opened 1½ years ago was the preparation of properly crafted mission and vision statements for the facility. Instead of completing this critical task, DCF Administration spent an inordinate amount of time assuring legislators, community providers and others that CJTS was a state of the art facility with cutting edge treatment and vocational rehabilitation for the boys who were

placed there. Unfortunately, as we reported previously, such assurances were untrue because DCF failed to provide proper leadership for the facility.

The interim management at CJTS recently developed a Vision and Mission Statement following a ballot by staff. It appears to have been developed without input from the DCF Administration. While it was laudable to include CJTS staff as part of a strategy to have staff take greater ownership of the facility – especially in light of the conflict that existed between staff and a prior administration – the process has not gone far enough.

The new Mission Statement is: “To rehabilitate adjudicated youth through education, treatment and training within a safe and secure environment.” This is accompanied by the following new Vision Statement: “CJTS is a cutting edge correctional facility focusing on rehabilitation and community re-integration through the efficient use of proven behavior management and educational methods in a structured and nurturing setting.” Neither these statements nor the actual practices at CJTS have resolved the question of whether CJTS defines itself primarily as a treatment center or as a juvenile correctional facility. It is critical that this fundamental issue be resolved because numerous critical decisions naturally flow from this determination.

The process of articulating a vision and mission for CJTS should be comprehensive and address all aspects of the facility. At the very least it should encompass the purpose for placing boys at CJTS and how associated goals will be achieved. Related policy must be developed clearly, with written expectations of staff duties and responsibilities in all areas, including the expectations and responsibilities of all disciplines. All policies and procedures governing the facility should be developed and implemented, within the confines of the law, in order to guide facility personnel in consistently providing a safe and nurturing environment for children.

The vision and infrastructure for operations at CJTS must be implemented with comprehensive training for all managers, supervisors and line staff. Aside from the obvious importance of ensuring that all levels are properly and consistently trained, such training should address the conceptual framework of the facility’s mission and the value each employee has within the vision. These very important tasks still need to be done.

- 5. The Connecticut Juvenile Training School leadership must take immediate steps to provide for the individualized needs of the children in their care. This will include the provision of appropriate treatment and education.**

One of the points that we made in our prior report was the need to immediately provide for the individualized needs of all children at CJTS. We have noted some improvements in educational programming. However, individualized treatment plans for each child are still not present.

The process should start from the moment that a child first enters the facility. All of the needs of all of the children, including assessing custody risk, clinical services, education, special education and recreation must be addressed in individualized treatment plans for each child. All disciplines should have meaningful input into such plans. It should also be clear which personnel in particular are responsible for developing these plans and for ensuring that they are properly implemented.

The entire process of developing individualized treatment plans needs to be developed to encompass all of the needs of the children from intake to ultimate discharge. Moreover, for children who are ultimately discharged from CJTS, this process should naturally flow into the process DCF utilizes for youth following discharge to ensure the availability of appropriate community based services to aid the youth with their interactions with the outside world.

6. DCF administration must ensure that management at CJTS is on site and accessible to all staff at all times and that such management fully understands all aspects of the facility and its programs.

The management at CJTS is still weak. The Superintendent position has only been filled on an interim basis. Many other management positions at the facility remain unfilled. A high priority must be assigned to rounding out the CJTS management team. Having a management team in place is the first step to ensuring that management plays an appropriate leadership role at the facility.

Management must be accessible to staff at all times. Management presence will ensure the availability of supervision as well as a resource for staff when important decisions are to be made.

The absence of a fully staffed management team at CJTS is painfully obvious. Numerous important policies and procedures directly affecting the safety and well being of the youth at CJTS still have not been developed, nearly 1½ years after CJTS opened. Restraints and seclusion are still over utilized and under reported. There is no meaningful process for developing individualized treatment plans for the youth at CJTS. Even matters as mundane as keeping CJTS clean – areas of CJTS are often filthy – cannot be accomplished properly since no one at CJTS appears to have responsibility for maintenance of the units where the youth live, other than sweeping the floors.

Specific performance expectations need to be established for all managers. Similarly, managers should establish specific performance expectations for supervisors and line staff in order to ensure proper accountability at all levels.

7. The Connecticut Juvenile Training School administration must define, develop and implement protocols for tracking and following up on “critical incidents.”

The term "critical incident" is a term that is supposed to encompass serious adverse events affecting youth that require immediate intervention and follow up (i.e. suicide attempt, incidents of abuse, assault of or by youth, etc.). While the term is widely used there is no clear understanding at CJTS of what matters constitute critical incidents and what is supposed to happen when a critical incident occurs.

Very little has been accomplished with regard to this recommendation. The facility's response to critical incidents remains very weak and inconsistent.

All critical incidents including those resulting in use of force, use of restraints or concerns about possible abuse or neglect should be evaluated promptly. Any such incidents should be reported and reviewed automatically as an ordinary function of the management and supervisory process.

8. The Connecticut Juvenile Training School administration must improve the process of imposing and reviewing sanctions on children at the facility.

Little has been done with respect to this recommendation. Although the current CJTS management has expressed thoughts on what the review process for youth charges and sanctions should be, it has yet to be memorialized in policy and implemented.

Since CJTS opened in August 2001, the facility has utterly failed to provide a fair and timely review process within CJTS to address youth behavior that has resulted in internal charges, sanction time and/or seclusion. The inability of CJTS to provide a mechanism to respond to these issues has had a substantial impact on the youth at CJTS. The absence of a proper process for imposing and reviewing sanctions on children at the facility raises substantial concern about the rights of the youth and staff, especially since the current practices are inconsistent and fail to respond to events that occur in a timely manner.

A structured process for imposing and reviewing sanctions must be implemented. All staff should be properly trained in the process. CJTS managers and supervisors also need to be especially vigilant in properly implementing mechanisms to ensure that policy and practice match each other and to generate a sense of fairness and understanding of the rules that exist both within this facility and in the community.

9. The actions of officials and employees of the Department of Children and Families should be reviewed to determine whether or not disciplinary action is warranted.

Some managers and supervisors have been reassigned, although it is not clear if the reassignments were as a result of the prior report or for other

reasons. Additionally, we understand that DCF Human Resources is still reviewing the conduct of certain personnel in light of this recommendation.

- 10. Oversight of state operated facilities serving children, such as the Connecticut Juvenile Training School, should be truly independent from DCF functions associated with program development and program administration in order to ensure that DCF decision making is objective.**

No action has been taken on this recommendation. DCF still needs to utilize the Bureau of Quality Management to provide independent oversight of the facility. Prior to our last report the DCF Commissioner commented publicly that if CJTS were a private facility it would probably not have been licensed. The Bureau of Quality Management has not reevaluated CJTS since our report. It is simply unacceptable to have a situation where a state operated facility is unable to meet the licensing standards that are applied to privately operated facilities. There is no reason why DCF cannot provide comprehensive oversight of operations. At this point, steps should be taken to immediately put in place an independent oversight structure for CJTS.

- 11. An effective internal quality assurance program is necessary at the Connecticut Juvenile Training School.**

Little progress has been made here. The internal quality assurance mechanism at CJTS should be the first line of accountability outside of the direct supervisory chain of command. An effective internal quality assurance program still needs to be defined and implemented. The internal quality assurance program at CJTS should be no less than what DCF expects of private facilities, and should certainly encompass all critical areas of safety and programming for the children there. DCF expects much smaller facilities to have dedicated quality assurance personnel – there is no reason why CJTS cannot meet the same standard.

- 12. The management structure and protocols for internal communication at the Department of Children and Families must be revamped so timely and accurate information is presented to responsible managers.**

Very little action has been taken in this area. Poor communication and lack of accountability continue to be issues plaguing CJTS and DCF Administration. The technology that exists within CJTS and DCF should allow for a constant flow of information, feedback, management and supervision. Instead, CJTS continues to function in isolation. There are numerous areas where communication is poor, including with the children within CJTS, with and among CJTS staff, CJTS management and DCF Administration.

The inability of all sectors at DCF to communicate with each other about CJTS as part of the ordinary flow of business, rather than as a result of pressure from monitoring and oversight, impedes the ability of CJTS to properly serve the children in its care. Hotline reports and critical incident reports should only

be one means of information gathering. More structured communication and oversight need to be put in place at CJTS in order to provide the quality assurance presence that is needed within this facility.

13. The Department of Children and Families should develop a long term planning unit that operates separately from program administration.

DCF still does not appear to do long term planning. We reiterate our recommendation that DCF should undertake a comprehensive analysis, on an ongoing basis, of the needs of youth under its supervision at this facility – and all other youth under DCF care or supervision – as well as future trends with respect to such needs. This exercise should be part of a systematic long-term planning effort, integral to anticipating and meeting the needs of young people at risk.

A meaningful planning function should be separate and independent from those divisions of DCF responsible for program administration. DCF's experience with the Connecticut Juvenile Training School demonstrates that decision-making suffers when the pressures of the day drive functions that should be independent. Proper long term planning involves careful assessment of future needs, matching those needs to existing programs and ascertaining what change is needed in order to serve the children better.

CONCLUSION

For all of the foregoing reasons we conclude that the Department of Children and Families has not taken appropriate steps to implement our recommendations for necessary change at the Connecticut Juvenile Training School. We continue to have extremely serious concerns about the operations of CJTS and the safety of the children there. We are also concerned that DCF does not appear to be taking corrective action with the sense of urgency commensurate with the seriousness of the problems at CJTS. Appropriate steps, such as those outlined in our recommendations, should be taken immediately to ensure that the needs of the children at the Connecticut Juvenile Training School are met in the future.

Dated at Hartford, Connecticut, this the 19th day of February, 2003.

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Child Advocate

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Attorney General