

Juvenile Justice

Dear Editor:

Recent changes with the Texas Juvenile Justice Department will mean changes at the local level regarding the handling of juvenile crime. It appears that the emphasis will be on keeping juveniles out of the adult corrections system and keeping them connected with their families and communities where possible. It is no small task to turn around the life of an adolescent who has begun to commit minor crimes. But it can be done and frequently the person who intervenes is a social worker. Social workers are professionals in our community who not only work every day to help people and families navigate difficult life transitions, but also work to solve the complex problems brought on by economic hardship or poor health.

Over the last decade, the need for social workers within the Texas Juvenile Justice System has been significant. Current research by the National Mental Health Association has suggested incorporating best practices to address the mental health, substance abuse and co-occurring needs of youth involved in the juvenile justice system. For example, the First Time Offender program, which is available in 43 of the 254 counties in the state, is committed to help young people avoid criminal behavior by addressing their mental health needs and by working to increase the stability of the family. Primary services that are provided range from screening and assessment, substance abuse counseling, case management and connecting families to community support systems.

Social workers are the "Bootstraps of Texas!" By helping our youth become successful, they make our communities a better place to live for all of us. Please honor their service by compensating them fairly and recognizing their contributions.

Sincerely,