

# US Department of Justice investigation finds Texas juvenile detention system tortures children

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The US Department of Justice released a devastating report on August 1 on the juvenile detention system in Texas, which is maintained by the Texas Juvenile Justice Department (TJJD), detailing rampant and systemic physical, sexual and psychological abuse of children by TJJD staff under the guise of rehabilitation and reintegration.

A little over two months after the report was released, Shandra Carter, executive director of the TJJD, was given a \$34,000 pay raise by the TJJD board, resulting in a total salary of \$261,352, confirming the abuse is in fact the policy of the government. The agency houses 66 percent of incarcerated children in the state.

The children against whom the state government commits these crimes are some of the most vulnerable in society, who are, on average, seven grades behind their peers. Ninety-one percent of the girls incarcerated are identified as clear or possible concerns for being victims of sex trafficking.

The titles of the report's chapters give an idea of the crimes committed by the TJJD against these children.

The first chapter is titled, "TJJD uses excessive force on children," and it has the subchapters "1.1 TJJD harms children by using pepper spray excessively and without adequate decontamination procedures," and "1.2 TJJD harms children by using excessive physical force and dangerous restraint techniques."

The Justice Department report says that the TJJD uses force that causes "the unnecessary and wanton infliction of pain," which it correctly states "violates the Constitution."

A review of video footage and incident reports revealed staff routinely use force that causes "the unnecessary and wanton infliction of pain" and is

"excessive to any legitimate government purpose. This violates children's constitutional rights." Staff used pepper spray on numerous occasions in 2022 on children, with little to no attempt to "engage verbally" with the children in question. Some of the children were handcuffed at the time.

More recently, former TJJD staff Ron Jackson was charged with assault and indicted on the charge of official oppression in February 2024 after both surveillance camera and body camera footage showed him "lift a child up and slam him to the floor, causing a laceration above the child's eye and a concussion."

In another instance, two Evins [Regional Juvenile Center in Edinburg] staff were charged with criminal offenses after body cam and surveillance footage showed them "slamming a child's head into a brick pillar, knocking him unconscious." The child was handcuffed with his hands behind his back. To add insult to injury, one of the staff allegedly turned off their body cameras and spat on the child before they dragged the boy to solitary confinement (called RSU).

Other instances of physical abuse include the use of dangerous physical restraint typically used by police forces, such as kneeling on childrens' backs and torsos, which can easily lead to cardiac arrest. Numerous people are killed each year in such a manner by police in the US, such as in the infamous case of George Floyd in 2020 by Minneapolis police in Minnesota and Kenneth Knotts in 2023 in Texas.

Chapter 2 is titled "TJJD harms children through excessive use of isolation." Its subchapters include "2.1 Children spend excessively long periods in RSU under unnecessarily restrictive conditions." Subchapter 2.2 reads "Children are isolated for excessively long

periods of time in the general population units.”

The report cites from the National Commission on Correctional Health Care, which stated in a 2016 position statement that for children, “time spent in solitary confinement [is] even more difficult and the developmental, psychological, and physical damage more comprehensive and lasting. They experience time differently—a day for a child feels longer than a day to an adult—and have a greater need for social stimulation.”

Of note is a section of the report which states that “Although TJJD policy appropriately limits most initial RSU admissions to one to two hours, we found many instances where children spent days or weeks in the RSU. In some cases, TJJD placed children there for non-behavioral reasons.” It further notes that children typically spent “22-23 hours a day in their cells, with some children spending twenty-four hours a day there.” Children are regularly spending 17-22 hours per day alone locked in their cells in general population units as well.

It is worth citing an excerpt from the United Nations Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) on this specific part:

The Mandela Rules, updated in 2015, are a revised minimum standard of UN rules that defines solitary confinement as “the confinement of prisoners for 22 hours or more a day without meaningful human contact.” Solitary confinement may only be imposed in exceptional circumstances, and “prolonged” solitary confinement of more than 15 consecutive days is regarded as a form of torture.

Under the definition provided by OHCHR and the Justice Department’s findings, it can be reasonably said that the Texas government is routinely and consistently torturing children in its detention centers.

Chapter 3’s title reads “TJJD fails to adequately protect children from sexual abuse” with 3.1 reading “TJJD fails to prevent staff from sexually abusing children.”

There are extensive details from the TJJD’s Office of

Inspector General on the numerous cases of sexual abuse of children by TJJD staff, including inappropriate relationships, “grooming and predatory behavior,” “kissing,” some of which have led to prosecutions.

This includes the case of an Evins staffer who was “indicted on charges of indecency with a child, improper sexual activity with a person in custody, and violation of the civil rights of a person in custody” in April 2024, for an incident in July 2021. The report notes that on-site observers from the DOJ are “consistent with the Office of Inspector General’s findings about inappropriate relationships between staff and children.”

The report also notes that the TJJD fails to “provide adequate mental health care” despite most children in the facility having “serious mental health needs, including histories of trauma, requiring treatment.” The inadequate mental healthcare puts them at “serious risk of harm” according to the report.

Children are also treated with a “one-size-fits-all” suicide prevention program which the report says “increases the risk of harm to children.”

Children with disabilities are also not evaluated for said disabilities, and TJJD “systematically reduces, changes, or eliminates special education and related services, ignoring children’s individualized needs.”

That the US ruling class engages in such barbaric treatment of children betrays its fraudulent claims to be fighting for so-called “freedom” and “democracy” in Ukraine, the Middle East, China or anywhere else for that matter, and demonstrates that capitalism is incompatible with the defense of basic democratic rights.



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