

RESOLUTION
STATE ADVISORY COUNCIL ON JUVENILE JUSTICE
January, 2009

The State Advisory Council on Juvenile Justice is a statutorily created body comprised of 31 members appointed by the Governor from all judicial districts within the State of Wyoming. It is the responsibility of this council to advise the Governor and to develop recommendations on needed juvenile justice issues. The Council must reconcile Wyoming's current Juvenile Justice processes into coherent and reasonable recommendations consistent with best practices. It strives to promote collective decision-making that creates unified agreement of intentions and expectations, genuine compromises and, when that is not possible, clear agreements to disagree. In early December of 2008, the Council held a meeting in Casper and, as a part of that meeting, toured the Casper Regional Juvenile Detention Center. This facility is owned by Natrona County and was operated as an adult jail until Natrona County built a new adult jail. Thereafter, it commenced to be used as a Regional Juvenile Detention Center which is currently operated by Cornerstone.

The Council called a special meeting on January 6, 2009 to consider a letter received from Pat Arthur of the National Center on Youth Law. In her letter, Ms. Arthur states, "I believe the conditions remain extremely harmful and potentially life threatening to youth" and "it needs to be closed – as soon as possible." Her letter echoes concerns expressed by the ACLU as well as recommendations contained in a 2007 Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention (OJJDP) sponsored report. As a result of this letter and a previous OJJDP evaluation the Council determined the concerns regarding ongoing use of the Casper Juvenile Detention Facility are very real and urgent. The Council also determined that there are additional stakeholders who need access to this information and an opportunity to voice their ideas and concerns; and that additional information would help the Council negotiate a definitive course of action regarding the Casper facility.

Therefore, the Council resolves to:

1. Seek information from state, county and local officials regarding the facility in order to:
 - a. identify the continuum of services that currently exist in Natrona County and how the Cornerstone Facility operates within that continuum;
 - b. understand the reasons for detaining the juveniles currently residing in the facility; and
 - c. assess how many current residents require secure detention to protect the community and determine whether some could be rehabilitated in a less restrictive setting.
2. Request detailed information from the Cornerstone Juvenile Detention officials regarding the concerns raised by Patricia Arthur and the previous evaluation conducted in 2007;
3. Share information with all officials who are involved with decisions regarding the licensing and use of this facility;
4. Work cooperatively to develop recommendations and encourage all parties to utilize the Council as a forum to develop unified agreement on the future of this detention facility and juvenile detention in general; and
5. Utilize the Council's Detention Review committee to monitor the situation and provide assistance when needed.

The Council believes it is important not to rush to decisions that could be counterproductive to an effective statewide continuum of care. However, the Wyoming State Advisory Council on Juvenile Justice believes the State of Wyoming must develop a clearly defined continuum of services from prevention through aftercare to serve all youth in the juvenile and adult justice systems. The current crisis with the Casper Juvenile Detention Facility requires a statewide response, not only to the use of this Facility, but to the pervasive overuse of juvenile detention throughout the State.

NEWS RELEASE

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January 19, 2009

From: Wyoming State Advisory on Juvenile Justice (SACJJ)

Re: SACJJ responds to calls for closure of Casper Juvenile Detention Facility

Contact: Donna Sheen, SACJJ President

The Council called a special meeting on January 6, 2009 to consider a letter received from Pat Arthur of the National Center on Youth Law. In her letter, Ms. Arthur states, "I believe the conditions remain extremely harmful and potentially life threatening to youth" and "it needs to be closed – as soon as possible." Her letter echoes concerns expressed by the ACLU as well as recommendations contained in a 2007 Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention (OJJDP) sponsored report. As a result of this letter and a previous OJJDP evaluation the Council determined the concerns regarding ongoing use of the Casper Juvenile Detention Facility are very real and urgent. The Council also determined that there are additional stakeholders who need access to this information and who should be provided with an opportunity to voice their ideas and concerns. The additional information would also help the Council negotiate a definitive course of action regarding the Casper facility.

The current crisis with the Casper Juvenile Detention Facility operated by Cornerstone highlights Wyoming's long overdue need to reform its juvenile justice system. Wyoming continues to maintain its status as the only state not in compliance with the Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention Act. The Wyoming State Advisory Council on Juvenile Justice believes the State of Wyoming must develop a clearly defined continuum of services from prevention through aftercare to serve all youth in the juvenile and adult justice systems. The pervasive overuse of secure detention for juveniles throughout the state needs to be addressed as part of a more sweeping reform effort. In response to the most recent crisis, the Council resolves to:

1. Seek information from state, county and local officials regarding the facility in order to:
 - a. identify the continuum of services that currently exist in Natrona County and how the Cornerstone Facility operates within that continuum;
 - b. understand the reasons for detaining the juveniles currently residing in the facility; and
 - c. assess how many current residents require secure detention to protect the community and determine whether some could be rehabilitated in a less restrictive setting.
2. Request detailed information from the Cornerstone Juvenile Detention officials regarding the concerns raised by Patricia Arthur and the previous evaluation conducted in 2007;
3. Share information with all officials who are involved with decisions regarding the licensing and use of this facility;
4. Work cooperatively to develop recommendations and encourage all parties to utilize the Council as a forum to develop unified agreement on the future of this detention facility and juvenile detention in general; and

NEWS RELEASE

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5. Utilize the Council's Detention Review committee to monitor the situation and provide assistance when needed.

About the Wyoming Juvenile Justice Advisory Council:

The State Advisory Council on Juvenile Justice is a statutorily created body comprised of 31 members appointed by the Governor from all judicial districts within the State of Wyoming. It is the responsibility of this council to advise the Governor and to develop recommendations on needed juvenile justice issues. The Council must reconcile Wyoming's current Juvenile Justice processes into coherent and reasonable recommendations consistent with best practices. It strives to promote collective decision-making that creates unified agreement of intentions and expectations, genuine compromises and, when that is not possible, clear agreements to disagree.

Tony Lewis, Director
Department of Family Services

Director Lewis:

As you are aware, The Council called a special meeting on January 6, 2009 to consider a letter received from Pat Arthur of the National Center on Youth Law. Council members were provided with your recommended response prior to the meeting. At the meeting, Council members voted to develop a more comprehensive response and directed me to assign a work group to develop a draft that would include a more formal Council resolution, requests for additional information, and letters that would inform and seek input from other stakeholders. The Council adopted the attached resolution as well as approving this and other letters to be sent to key stakeholders. We've also were copied you on all of the correspondence, to ensure that you remain fully informed of our actions.

In addition to sharing this information with you, the Council requests the following information from your agency:

1. A review of the current licensing procedures for detention facilities in Wyoming, and a summary of the most recent evaluation of the Casper Detention Facility operated by Cornerstone.
2. The Agency's response to the issues stated in the attached Patricia Arthur letter, and the previous evaluation conducted by OJJDP.
3. A description of the continuum of services that currently exists in Natrona County from least restrictive level of care to most restrictive level of care and how the Cornerstone Facility operates within that continuum.
4. An assessment of the current residents in the Casper Juvenile Detention Facility and the agency's perspective on which ones require secure detention and which ones could be better served in a non secure less restrictive environment.
5. Recommendations on how the Advisory Council can be helpful with this situation and in future matters.

We would also like to extend an invitation for you to discuss this issue further at the upcoming Council meeting so that we can find workable solutions. Our next meeting is scheduled for February 12 & 13, 2009 in Cheyenne. The Council greatly appreciates the cooperative relationship we have with your agency and we look forward to working with you to continue improving the juvenile justice system in Wyoming.

Sincerely,

Donna Sheen

Cornerstone Juvenile Detention Facility:

Thank you for your hospitality at our December meeting, as well as your honesty in explaining some of the challenges you face in operating the Casper Juvenile Detention Facility. After our visit in December, the Council received a letter from Pat Arthur of the National Center on Youth Law. In her letter, Ms. Arthur states, "I believe the conditions remain extremely harmful and potentially life threatening to youth" and "it needs to be closed – as soon as possible." Her letter echoes concerns expressed by the ACLU as well as recommendations contained in a 2007 Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention (OJJDP) sponsored report. As a result of this letter and the previous OJJDP evaluation, the Council determined the concerns regarding the ongoing use of the Casper Juvenile Detention Facility are very real and urgent. The Council also determined that there are additional stakeholders who need access to this information and who should be provided with an opportunity to voice their ideas and concerns, including your company. Additional information would also help the Council negotiate a definitive course of action regarding the Casper facility.

Therefore, the Council requests the following information from your company:

1. A detailed response regarding the issues raised in the attached Patricia Arthur letter, and the previous evaluation conducted by OJJDP.
2. Current plans, including a time line, for future changes in the facility or detention services in Natrona County and the State of Wyoming.
3. Any additional program and facility evaluations that have been conducted that would be helpful to the Council regarding the Casper Facility.
4. Recommendations on how the Advisory Council can be helpful with this situation and in future matters.

We would also like to extend an invitation for you to attend our Council meeting to discuss these issues in more depth. The Council meets on a bi-monthly basis and our next meeting is scheduled for February 12 & 13, 2009 in Cheyenne. The Council greatly appreciates the cooperative relationship we have with your company and we look forward to working with you to continue improving the juvenile justice system in Wyoming.

Sincerely,

Donna Sheen

Natrona County Commissioners:

As you may be aware, The Wyoming State Advisory Council on Juvenile Justice toured the Natrona County Juvenile Detention Facility at our December meeting in Casper. The Council then received a letter from Pat Arthur of the National Center on Youth Law, who was in attendance at our meeting. In her letter, Ms. Arthur states, "I believe the conditions remain extremely harmful and potentially life threatening to youth" and "it needs to be closed – as soon as possible." Her letter echoes concerns expressed by the ACLU as well as recommendations contained in a 2007 Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention (OJJDP) sponsored report. As a result of this letter and the previous OJJDP evaluation, the Council determined the concerns regarding the ongoing use of the Casper Juvenile Detention Facility are very real and urgent. The Council also agreed that there are additional stakeholders who need access to this information and an opportunity to voice their ideas and concerns, including your group. Additional information would help the Council negotiate a definitive course of action regarding the Casper facility.

The Council understands the difficult position Natrona County is currently in and wants to be of assistance in finding reasonable alternatives. Many of the juvenile detention issues you are facing are not unique to Natrona County. Finding a positive solution in Natrona County may provide us with some insight on how to address juvenile detention issues throughout the State. We would appreciate any information the County can provide the Council regarding the current status of the Casper Juvenile Detention Facility operated by Cornerstone and plans regarding its future usage. We would also like to extend an invitation for you to attend a Council meeting to discuss these issues in more depth, in hopes of finding workable solutions. The Council meets on a bi-monthly basis and our next meeting is scheduled for February 12 & 13, 2009 in Cheyenne.

We look forward to working with you to continue improving the juvenile justice system in Natrona County and the State of Wyoming.

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We look forward to working with you to continue improving the juvenile justice system in Natrona County and the State of Wyoming.

Sincerely,

Donna Sheen

State Judges, Prosecutors, and Law Enforcement

The State Advisory Council on Juvenile Justice is a statutorily created body comprised of 31 members appointed by the Governor from all judicial districts within the State of Wyoming. It is the responsibility of this council to advise the Governor and to develop recommendations on important juvenile justice issues. In early December of 2008, the Council held a meeting in Casper and, as a part of that meeting, toured the Casper Regional Juvenile Detention Center. This facility is owned by Natrona County and was operated as an adult jail until Natrona County built a new adult jail. Thereafter, it commenced to be used as a Regional Juvenile Detention Center which is currently operated by Cornerstone.

The council subsequently received a letter and report from Pat Arthur of the National Center on Youth Law concerning the current Casper Regional Juvenile Detention Center in which she stated, "I believe the conditions remain extremely harmful and potentially life threatening to youth" and "it needs to be closed – as soon as possible." Her letter echoes concerns expressed by the ACLU, as well as recommendations contained in a 2007 Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention (OJJDP) sponsored report. As a result of this letter, our tour, and the previous reports, the Council determined that concerns regarding the ongoing use of the Casper Juvenile Detention Facility are very real and urgent. The Council has adopted the attached resolution.

As you will see in the resolution, the Council determined that there are additional stakeholders who should have access to this information and an opportunity to voice their ideas and concerns, not only regarding the facility in Casper, but the larger issues regarding the juvenile justice system in the State of Wyoming. Your awareness and involvement will help the Council negotiate a definitive course of action and help inform decisions made about the juvenile justice system in the State of Wyoming. It is for this reason that we are contacting you. We wish to disseminate this information among stakeholders that interact within the juvenile justice system on a regular basis, as well as request information that you believe would assist us in developing a positive, comprehensive response to this issue, as well as others that impact the children of Wyoming. We invite you to offer your suggestions to the Council, either at our bi-monthly meetings or through written communication. Our next meeting is scheduled for February 12-13 in Cheyenne.

The Council greatly appreciates your commitment and dedication and we look forward to working with you to develop a positive juvenile justice system in Wyoming.

Sincerely,

Donna Sheen