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Fact Sheet

COMMISSIONER'S OFFICE

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Fact Sheet: Preventing abuse at McLaughlin Youth Center

The Division of Juvenile Justice has a zero-tolerance policy toward sexual assault, or any kind of abuse, whether between youth or between staff and youth.

The issue: A new national study by the U.S. Justice Department suggests the rate of sexual victimization at McLaughlin is 15 percent, just above the national rate at similar facilities of 12 percent.

In the national survey, residents were asked whether they had been forced into sexual activity with other youths in the past 12 months, and also whether they had had any sexual contact with staff, willingly or not.

Other surveys on abuse at McLaughlin: In 2005, McLaughlin and other Alaska youth facilities became participants in the national Performance-based Standards program, a voluntary effort that requires McLaughlin to regularly survey residents to determine their personal safety. This survey suggested that the rate of sexual assault at McLaughlin was between 3-4 percent. While the questions were not identical to the Justice Department survey, this survey suggests a much lower rate of abuse. Any instance of abuse is unacceptable, and the division has a zero-tolerance policy when it comes to any form of abuse.

In Alaska, it's a crime for someone in a position of authority to engage in any kind of sexual contact with a minor.

Division of Juvenile Justice's Plan of Action to Address Sexual Victimization in Youth Facilities

1. What have we done to date?

- A. Hired additional staff to ensure that we have two full time trained staff on each unit at all times.
- B. Hired additional Behavioral Health clinicians across the state and now McLaughlin has one clinician assigned to each unit

- a. May 2009 developed and conducted our first annual mental health survey for community detention and facility youth regarding access to and satisfaction with the behavioral health clinicians
 - i. 74% of youth had met with a behavioral health clinician
 - ii. 48% of youth had met with a clinician 4 or more times.
 - iii. 86% of youth thought the behavioral health clinician was somewhat helpful.
 - iv. 79% of youth thought the behavioral health clinician was a good listener.
 - v. 18% of youth wanted to talk with a behavioral health clinician about something that was bothering them.
- C. Performance base Standard (PbS) is a national quality assurance program that the DJJ joined in 2004
- a. Developed by the Council of Juvenile Corrections Administrators to improve the conditions of confinement for youth in juvenile facilities.
 - b. Data collection and submission of data occurs every six months.
 - c. The Alaska PbS consultant has been to Alaska three times to provide face-to-face consultation with each youth facility.
 - d. Youth are surveyed every six months about conditions of confinement, including feelings of safety and whether they have been forced to engage in sexual activity. Results from those surveys have consistently been significantly lower than results in the Prison Rape Elimination Act (PREA) survey regarding sexual victimization.
 - e. Since October, 2004 665 McLaughlin youth answered the question on the PbS survey "since you have been at this facility, has anyone forced you to engage in sexual activity?" This includes both staff or youth on youth sexual activity.
 - i. 638 answered no
 - ii. 27 answered yes
 - iii. Total = 04%
 - f. MYC Detention and Treatment units have had Facility Improvement Plans (all part of PbS) related to youth's feelings of safety in the facility. These FIP's resulted in several changes to operation including:
 - i. Confidential follow-up surveys for youth
 - ii. Update to resident orientation manuals regarding what to do if they are feeling fearful
 - iii. Question added to mental health/suicide screening form about whether youth is feeling fearful

- iv. Policy change regarding resident grievances, including locked boxes on units, with grievances going directly to the superintendent.
 - v. Policy requires that all youth be observed at intervals not to exceed 15 minutes whenever they are in their rooms. The Guard 1 room check system records these checks electronically.
- D. McLaughlin Yough Center (MYC) in the past three years implemented a new restraint procedure called “Handle with Care” to ensure that the youth and staff were safer when a restraint had to take place.
- E. Recently approved new staff investigation policies that was approved by Human Resources and all of the managers have been trained on the policy.
- F. Three years ago the Division of Juvenile Justice (DJJ) drafted a new suicide policy with the help of Lindsay Hayes the expert in this field. It is a policy that continues to be praised by PbS and is currently being utilized as a model policy to address suicide prevention in secure settings across the nation.
 - a. The policy is taught by the behavioral clinicians annually to all facility staff and juvenile probation staff who do escorts across the state.
 - b. The policy is reviewed every six months by staff and is changed to improve the safety of the youth.

2. What is new on the Horizon?

- A. Finalize the Prison Rape Elimination Act policy that is in draft form.
 - a. Policy needs to be approved by the senior management team upon completion.
 - b. Once approved the policy will need to be trained to all staff and will be tracked through the PbS Facility Improvement Plan process in each Alaska DJJ Youth Facility
- B. During the next Council of Juvenile Corrections Administrators conference later this month, DJJ will need to consult with other administrators about their policies and find out what is working for them.
- C. Continue to work with the Alaska PbS coordinator to find out other strategies that DJJ facilities can implement to improve the safety of the youth.
- D. Collect Pbs data quarterly rather than semi-annually on room confinement and other safety related critical outcomes.
- E. McLaughlin’s Managers plan
 - a. This week all of McLaughlin’s residents will meet with one of the superintendents to reemphasize MYC’s zero tolerance for

sexual abuse of any Kind. The superintendents will be going over what residents should do if they believe they are abused in any way and how they can get help.

- b. By the end of February, all staff will attend a mandatory one hour training about PREA and our zero tolerance for sexual abuse of any kind.
 - c. MYC will be reviewing the orientation provided to new residents, specifically, what is told to residents about zero tolerance and how a resident should report abuse. All of the resident manuals will be reviewed to ensure this information is clarified and is in the manual.
 - d. MYC is looking at UAA to see if they can implement a new survey about sexual abuse in the facility administered to all residents this spring.
 - e. All Unit Supervisors will work one swing shift per week.
 - f. All McLaughlin superintendents will visit the units more consistently, bare minimum once a week.
- F. DJJ will continue to read and dissect the report to find out what can we learn and are there any common threads. For example, doing a review of the states that have a high percentage of indigenous American Indians/Alaska Native only North and South Dakota have a lower rate of victimization than Alaska, and their data was significantly lower. Arizona, Maine, Montana, New Mexico and Oklahoma rates all were higher than Alaska's.