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## Best in the Business

# PREA Compliance Measures Under Way at Georgia's DJJ

By Adam Barnett

**T**he Georgia Department of Juvenile Justice's (DJJ) first statewide Prison Rape Elimination Act (PREA) coordinator was hired March 1, 2012. The PREA coordinator unified Georgia's DJJ Task Force findings and combined them with PREA national standards. Today, a DJJ oversight committee routinely monitors and reviews all Georgia juvenile detention centers for PREA standards compliance. PREA goals are included in DJJ's Fiscal Years 2013-2016 Strategic Plan to ensure budget commitments and annual allocations of staff. Monthly committee meetings evaluate Georgia's PREA planning and progress, provide technical assistance, deliver quality assurance documentation, and address deficits with corrective action plans to sustain improvements.

DJJ provides secure housing, programming, mental health and health care services, and education for juveniles who are on probation, awaiting adjudication, or have been committed to detention. To accomplish this mission, DJJ houses approximately 2,000 juveniles in 28 secure facilities across the state. The Georgia juvenile justice support system also operates 92 court services offices to supervise approximately 15,000 youths on probation, while contracting with 77 community residential providers.

DJJ's first stand-alone PREA policy was authorized on Aug. 15, 2012, and PREA National Standards were integrated into more than 50 pre-existing DJJ policies to ensure an overriding agency protocol encouraging all DJJ facilities, residential programs and offices to comply with all applicable laws. Beginning April 1, 2012, all public and private agencies contracting with DJJ for the confinement of youths include a legal obligation to adopt and comply with PREA standards as part of their new contract or contract renewal. The U.S. Department of Justice (DOJ) requires that during a three-year cycle, one-third of an agency's facilities must be audited by a certified DOJ auditor each year. The cycle will begin on Aug. 20, 2013.

The state of Georgia began implementing PREA throughout the DJJ system by first creating a Safety and Security Task Force. The task force was divided into four subgroups, with select members from the Georgia Board of Pardons and Paroles, the Georgia Department of Corrections, DJJ and the DJJ Board. Each task force subgroup was responsible for making inspection visits at DJJ's secured facilities and for completing safety and security reports on areas directly impacted by strict PREA requirements.

DJJ Commissioner Avery D. Niles understood that the success of implementing PREA standards into the Georgia juvenile justice system would also depend on the ability of agency leadership to promote a systemic "zero tolerance" philosophy to prevent incidents of sexual abuse, misconduct or harassment. "Many of our existing facility accountability systems, such as closed circuit television (CCTV) monitoring, incident reporting and counseling services, were already working within PREA guidelines to help ensure the safety and security of Georgia's youths in our secure facilities," Niles said. "But organizational adjustments were also needed. Youths and staff needed to view sexual abuse and harassment in a different light. Having a PREA zero tolerance policy ensures that youths know the rules are strictly enforced — and that staff are aware they are responsible for the safety of youths in DJJ custody."

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DJJ staff now ensure that all hidden or secluded areas, such as blind spots and janitor closets where covert sexual behavior may occur, must be monitored and kept locked at all times. Personnel must follow secure facility key control policy to ensure staff are denied access to areas where staff and youths may interact after hours. Blind spots are identified and managed by repositioning officers or CCTV cameras on internal and external grounds.

Internal windows and doors must be kept free of obstructions from posters, blinds or other obstacles which may block direct line of sight into offices or rooms. Blinds are permitted in medical examination rooms; however, blinds must be kept open when no youths are present. The agency is in the process of installing

"PREA-friendly" shower curtains on all shower stalls. The specially-designed shower curtains provide a clear view of upper head and torso and lower legs and feet, while the center curtain area shields the youth's midsection to protect privacy.

When possible, at least two trained, Peace Officer Standards Training-certified officers are present to frisk inmates and conduct strip searches. Strip searches are conducted in areas that provide privacy, by trained correctional officers of the same sex as the youth being searched. When a same-sex staff member is unavailable, the youth to be searched must be kept under constant visual supervision in a secure location until a same-sex staff member is available to conduct the search.

"Facility staff are trained to understand the crucial nature of enforcing detailed PREA standards in secure facilities," Niles said. "As of February 2013, more than 6,500 Georgia juvenile justice staff members, volunteers, contractors and interns completed DJJ's new PREA training based on his or her level of contact with DJJ youths." Even for community residential providers that house fewer than 51 percent of DJJ residents, Georgia requires completion of PREA video training as part of the agency's best practices. Georgia uses a presentation titled, "Keeping Our Kids Safe: The Prison Rape Elimination Act and Juvenile Justice," as an overview of PREA standards and requirements. To supplement this training, DJJ conducts PREA compliance discussions during shift briefings and facility meetings and heightens staff awareness through high-visibility PREA policy reminder posters.

Upon arrival at a DJJ facility, DJJ residents receive PREA flyers with age-appropriate discussion information explaining the agency's zero tolerance sexual abuse and harassment policy, how to report incidents or suspicions of violations, and the youth's rights to be free from retaliation for reporting such incidents. DJJ gives all youths the right to file grievances against any inappropriate or infringing conditions, behaviors or actions of staff, volunteers or other youths.

Within 24 hours of a resident's arrival and at all subsequent reassessments throughout confinement, staff obtain personal history and behavior information from each youth to help reduce his or her risk of sexual abuse. Information is obtained from a variety of critical and timely medical and mental health assessments or screening instruments to support decisions about custody, housing, education, and comprehensive risk and needs. Within 72 hours of intake, secure facilities provide comprehensive age-appropriate education to residents, including youth PREA awareness materials. These include posters, resident handbooks, the Youth Safety Guide for Secure Facilities pamphlet and an orientation DVD personally videotaped by Niles. All residents are required to sign a Youth PREA Acknowledgement Statement.

To ensure a safe environment and secure operations, DJJ staff objectively classify and house youths according to standard criteria of risk, age, size, conduct and offense history. Youths in a secure facility are housed based on their custody and housing assessment. Youths in residential programs are housed based on an authorized housing assignment plan approved by the DJJ statewide residential

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**Astonishing!** Escaped inmate captured three days later with armband intact!  
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## Juvenile Justice News

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program coordinator. Assignments are not based solely on a youth's sexual orientation or gender identity.

DJJ also honors all anonymous third-party reporting. An intelligence tip line was initiated to provide youths in the community, staff in the facilities and the general public with a means to report third-party sexual abuse, sexual harassment, or youths or staff seeking relief against retaliation for reporting. If reasonable cause exists to believe a child has been abused, DJJ requires directors to immediately report any allegation of child abuse or neglect to the Georgia Department of Family and Children Services no later than 24 hours from the time the allegation is received. This includes allegations of youth-on-youth sexual penetration, or youth-on-youth sexual contact, as well as staff/contractor/volunteer/intern sexual penetration, or staff/contractor/volunteer/intern sexual contact of any youths under the age of 18.

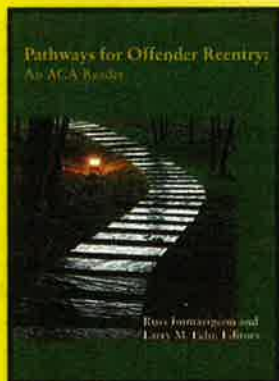
The staff member receiving information on allegations of sexual assault must immediately refer the youth to medical services staff for initial evaluation and determination of the need for an outside medical referral for further testing and evaluation. The principal investigator must be contacted within two hours of any incident to assign an investigator to the case. The first direct care staff member to respond to the sexual assault report is required to take

steps to separate the alleged victim and abuser; to preserve and protect any crime scene until appropriate steps can be taken to collect evidence; and to request that both alleged victim and abuser not to take actions that could destroy physical evidence on his or her clothing or person.

The agency's Office of Investigations is responsible for the official investigation of all allegations of sexual abuse on DJJ property or in residential programs contracted by DJJ, including any third-party or anonymous reports. DJJ has an established history of transparency in juvenile justice operations and administration, and for engaging in best practices to initiate investigations of allegations of sexual abuse at both the state-run and contract facilities under its direct control.

"We welcome the implementation of PREA as an innovation in agency culture change, attitudes, beliefs, values, norms and prejudices. We embrace the PREA zero tolerance policy concept against sexual abuse and sexual harassment within the Georgia DJJ," Niles said. "In many ways, the implementation of Georgia's PREA policies is the emblem of my first priority for DJJ: to operate and promote safe and secure facilities and communities for our youths and staff."

*Adam Barnett is the PREA coordinator for the Georgia Department of Juvenile Justice.*



## Pathways for Offender Reentry: An ACA Reader

*Russ Immarigeon and Larry Fehr, Editors*

ACA's newest reader features 22 leading practitioners' essays on five themes in offender reentry, in an engaging, easy-to-read format. The reader covers topics such as reintegration issues unique to female offenders, collateral consequences, and ways to ease the strain of prisoners' reintroduction to society. Resources available through faith-based and other initiatives are discussed, along with issues relevant to families, mental health care, substance-abuse treatment, and housing. The book closes with a section on future perspectives, evaluating what is next in offender reentry. Includes appendix of additional resources. "This is a must-read for anyone engaged in the discourse on prisoner reentry... a great text for students entering the correctional field."—Sarah C. Walker, COO, 180 Degrees, and Founder of Minnesota Second Chance Coalition

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