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Price Unit leaders must respond to criticism

By ENTERPRISE OPINIONS

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The people who run the Al Price Unit of the Texas Youth Commission need to do some talking. They need to tell all taxpayers and especially those in Southeast Texas what they think of sharp criticism leveled at them by four advocacy groups.

The groups say that reforms enacted by the Texas Youth Commission four years ago have not corrected some fundamental flaws in the state system. The Price Unit, which houses 165 inmates, was singled out as a poster child for a system that too often fails to help many of its young offenders.

The allegations leveled at the Price Unit include:

-- providing school only three days a week instead of five because of teaching staff shortages and absences;

-- lack of mental health assistance, with one youth waiting more than a month to see a counselor and others given psychotropic medication without oversight.

Also, from March 1 through May 31, the Price Unit had the highest number (39) of inmate-on-inmate sexual misconduct violations in the TYC, and the second-highest number (49) of contraband or drug seizures.

Allegations and statistics like that are serious. They suggest an atmosphere of bureaucratic indifference that undercuts other employees who are dedicated to their difficult jobs.

If that's the reality at the Price Unit, it's unacceptable. Not all young offenders can be rehabilitated, but every effort must be made to save those who can still be reached.

The men and women who run the Price Unit must respond. If the unit has shortcomings, they must acknowledge them - and fix them. Their mission is too important for anything less than their best effort - all the time, with every inmate.