



Texas Pepper Spray Dispute Settled

Texas Youth Commission Settles Lawsuit Over Use of Pepper Spray on Unruly Young Offenders

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AUSTIN, Texas

A new settlement restricts the use of pepper spray on young offenders in the custody of the Texas Youth Commission, officials said.

The settlement, reached Friday, rescinds a commission order last month that allowed for pepper spray to subdue unruly juveniles before other forms of restraint are applied.

The commission argued in liberalizing the policy that using pepper spray before physical restraint would reduce injuries to staff and inmates, and lower workers' compensation claims. But critics said its use subsequently skyrocketed in youth lockups.

The settlement comes in a lawsuit originally filed on behalf of three 15-year-old incarcerated youths with mental disabilities, including one boy who had allegedly been sprayed three times and suffered skin burns for "self-injurious behavior."

"We are pleased with the provisions outlined in the settlement agreement and applaud the agency for coming to the table to settle this suit," said Jim George, an attorney for Texas Appleseed and Advocacy Inc., an activist group that promotes legal and social equality and filed the lawsuit.

Youth Commission spokesman Jim Hurley said the agency was satisfied with the settlement, which takes effect immediately.

The commission was hit by scandal in February after The Dallas Morning News and The Texas Observer reported that officials ignored signs of sexual abuse of inmates at the West Texas State School in Pyote.

Since then, more than 5,500 reports of abuse or neglect have come in on the commission's complaint hotline, nearly 3,000 juvenile inmates have been released or relocated and the agency has undergone a restructuring.

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