



July 25, 2018

The Honorable William Weston J. Newton
Chair, Legislative Oversight Committee
South Carolina House of Representatives
Post Office Box 11867
Columbia, South Carolina 29211

Dear Chairman Newton:

I am in receipt of your letter dated June 28, 2018. In this letter, you requested information from the SC Department of Juvenile Justice (Department or DJJ) concerning a single media/blog report that "recounted numerous fights among juveniles" at BRRC on June 15, 2018. You also ask the Department to "provide the Committee with an update on...implementation of the [2017] recommendations" of the Committee and the Legislative Audit Council (LAC). Please allow this letter to serve as responses to your inquiries.

On Friday, June 15, 2018, three separate/isolated incidents of physical altercations between youth occurred at BRRC, DJJ's long-term facility in Columbia, SC. The initial incident occurred in a dorm before the start of school. Two juveniles were engaged in a verbal altercation that turned into a physical fight. Juvenile Correctional Officers separated the two males immediately, and there were no injuries (to youth or staff) during the incident. A few hours later, an unrelated incident occurred in the academic building of Birchwood School during class change as one student hit another student from behind. There were no other juveniles involved and no injuries to students or staff. At approximately the same time, two male students were horse-playing in a vocational classroom (in a separate building at the Birchwood School), and this horse-play turned into a physical altercation. There were no injuries to students or staff.

DJJ staff followed agency policy and standard operating procedures to de-escalate each of the incidents on Friday, June 15, 2018. After the incidents, the young men involved in the altercations received a negative behavior report. They received a Due Process Hearing with recommendations of three (3) days loss of privileges, additional work duty and peer mediation.

In addition, several programs have been added recently at BRRC to encourage positive behavior amongst our youth. With the start of this year, DJJ began a leadership group with the young people in our care. We identified those students that needed the extra attention due to their aggressive conduct in order to engage them and redirect their negative behavior. They meet monthly, dress in professional attire and discuss character building topics. In August, we will begin Pough's Protégés afterschool club. The students selected will serve as ambassadors for

The Honorable William Weston J. Newton
July 25, 2018
Page Two

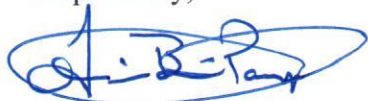
their dorm. Each will be tasked with holding unit meetings and talking with me about ways we can improve services for the agency. We are striving to offer meaningful and impactful opportunities to these young people. We noticed that after we began our peer mediation group, the student mediators are displaying such pride in their leadership role, and it is being noticed by their peers. DJJ will continue to enhance programming to ensure that we are empowering all of our youth for the future.

Also, as part of an overall strategy to enhance recruitment and retention of front-line staff, the Department's budget request for the 2018-19 fiscal year included a \$1,000.00 salary increase for DJJ's correctional officers. This request for a salary increase for correctional officers was intended to assist in reducing the overall shortages in correctional staffing DJJ experiences due to lack of a competitive salary and the challenging nature of the job being performed. This request was not funded by the General Assembly. Unfortunately for DJJ, the starting salary for our correctional officers negatively affects DJJ's ability to hire and retain qualified correctional officers, impacting the Department's ability to lower the ratio of youth to correctional officers which would have a positive impact on lowering the amount of incidents that you inquired about which may occur in our secure facilities. Despite this set-back, DJJ will continue to advocate for competitive salaries for DJJ staff with members of the General Assembly and state leadership.

Finally, in follow-up to the Committee's inquiry as to the status of the study and LAC recommendations, DJJ adopted and completed the study recommendations. In addition, the Department has completed 97% of the LAC recommendations to date. The two recommendations that are pending completion are (1) adopting the recommendations of the independent security audit and (2) procuring an independent audit of fixed assets. DJJ accepted the fence detection system recommendation pending approval of funds in the FY 2019-2020 budget request.

Thank you to members of the Committee for your support of DJJ as we continue to enhance services provided to youth and communities across South Carolina. I trust you will find the above information responsive to your requests. If I can answer any additional questions, please do not hesitate to contact me.

Respectfully,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "Freddie B. Pough", enclosed within a blue oval.

Freddie B. Pough
Director

cc: House Legislative Oversight Committee Members
The Honorable Jay Lucas, Speaker of the South Carolina House
Senate Special Study Committee on the Department of Juvenile Justice
The Honorable Henry McMaster, Governor of South Carolina