



HEIDI CAMPBELL
20TH SENATORIAL DISTRICT

425 REP. JOHN LEWIS WAY
CORDELL HULL BUILDING
SUITE 770
NASHVILLE, TENNESSEE 37243
615-741-6679

Tennessee State Senate

COMMITTEES

ENERGY, AGRICULTURE AND
NATURAL RESOURCES

TRANSPORTATION

FISCAL REVIEW

November 17, 2023

Commissioner Margie Quin
Tennessee Department of Children's Services
UBS Tower, 10th Floor
315 Deaderick Street
Nashville, TN 37238

Commissioner Quin,

An article published Nov. 16, 2023 by ProPublica and WPLN/Nashville Public Radio demands an immediate response and action from the Department of Children's Services.

It is alarming, but sadly not surprising, to read that children are being held in seclusion — in direct violation of state law and department rules — and potentially suffering abuse while in state custody at the Richard L. Bean Juvenile Service Center in Knoxville, Tenn.

Sentiments shared to the reporter Paige Pflieger by the center's administrator are equally disturbing. He said, "What we do is treat everybody like they're in here for murder... If I got in trouble for it, I believe I could talk to whoever got me in trouble and get out of it."

The Department has a constitutional duty to the legislature to enforce state laws and a moral obligation to children to ensure that youth in state-licensed facilities are being treated humanely and in accordance with Department guidelines. Any juvenile detention facility administrator who openly defies state detention rules is promoting a culture of lawlessness and should soon find themselves out of a job.

What's worse is that this is not an isolated incident. Even after several years of intense scrutiny of the Department's practices, unsanctioned activity — similar to what is alleged to have taken place at the Bean center — has also been reported at the Wilder Youth Development Center as well as the Rutherford County Juvenile Detention Center.

There is no excuse for cutting corners or for lax enforcement of state law when the consequences of these failures so clearly affect minors who have already fallen through the cracks.

To make culture changes that improve the lives of youth engaged with our juvenile justice system, the Department must set a high standard for itself and its community partners.

To that end, we are requesting an immediate compliance audit of the Juvenile Detention Facilities regarding applicable state and federal laws and DCS rules, regulations and policies. We also ask Department leadership to intervene immediately to prevent minors from being confined in ways that are inconsistent with state law and to develop a more aggressive enforcement policy to ensure future compliance.

We understand the challenges the Department is up against and we know how difficult the important work of caring for youth in detention can be. But no matter how unruly, combative, or difficult a child may be, it is the Department's responsibility to support them in a compassionate, responsible, ethical, and legal manner.

We respectfully await your response.

Sincerely,



Senator Heidi Campbell



Senator Sara Kyle



Representative Aftyn Behn



Representative John Ray Clemmons



Representative Bob Freeman



Representative G.A. Hardaway



Representative Torrey Harris



Representative Caleb Hemmer



Representative Gloria Johnson



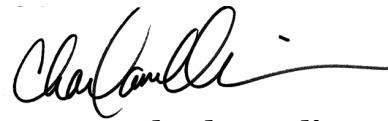
Representative Sam McKenzie



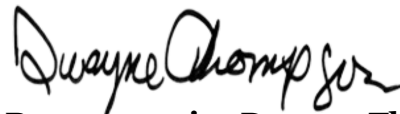
Representative Larry Miller



Representative Bo Mitchell



Senator Charlane Oliver



Representative Dwayne Thompson

CC: **Jonathan Skrmetti**
Tennessee Attorney General

Charme Allen
Knox County District Attorney