



TCSO 2019 PREA Annual Report

Prepared by PREA Coordinator Kristi Wings-Yanez

Background

The Prison Rape Elimination Act (PREA) was passed by Congress and signed into federal law by President George W. Bush in 2003 to prevent, detect and respond to sexual abuse and sexual harassment occurring in confinement settings. The National Prison Rape Elimination Commission developed national standards which apply to adult prisons and jails, juvenile facilities, lockups and community confinement facilities.

Travis County Sheriff's Office Zero Tolerance Policy

The Travis County Sheriff's Office (TCSO) has ZERO TOLERANCE for all forms of sexual abuse and sexual harassment within its jail facilities. It is the policy of the Sheriff's Office to respond to, and administratively and/or criminally investigate all alleged incidents of a sexual nature. Every reported incident of a sexual nature will be taken seriously, investigated fully, and appropriate action will be taken as warranted. Procedures are in place to prevent, detect, and respond to sexual misconduct in accordance with federal PREA standards.

TCSO's two correctional facilities achieved full compliance with PREA following intensive audits in 2016. TCSO has a designated agency-wide PREA Coordinator, who coordinates all PREA efforts, as well as PREA Compliance Officers at both the Travis County Correctional Complex (TCCC) and Travis County Jail (TCJ) who serve as facility compliance managers. Other efforts to comply with the PREA standards include, but are not limited to:

- Training for all staff, volunteers, contractors and inmates
- Specialized investigative, medical and mental health training
- Collaboration with the Travis County Victim Services Unit
- Collaboration with SAFE Alliance (rape crisis counseling, forensic exams and victim services)
- Implementation of internal reporting hotline
- Agreement with SAFE Alliance for provision of confidential or anonymous support services hotline
- Development of education materials to be provided to inmates
- Assessment for risk of victimization during initial intake
- Deployment of video monitoring systems

- Appropriate staffing and maintaining minimum staffing levels
- Hiring and promotion standards
- Appropriate classification, reclassification, and housing of all inmates
- Coordinated response to all incidents by first responders, medical and mental health practitioners, investigators and facility leadership
- Thorough investigations of all complaints of sexual misconduct

2019 Survey of Sexual Violence

Each year, TCSO collects PREA data in accordance with PREA standard 115.87 in order to assess and improve the effectiveness of its sexual abuse prevention, detection, and response policies, practices and training. The information collected for this report will be used to identify problem areas and to take corrective action on an ongoing basis. This data must also be reported to the U.S. Department of Justice, Bureau of Justice Statistics, when requested. The statistics for 2019 were:

Inmate on Inmate Nonconsensual Sexual Acts:

Substantiated	3
Unsubstantiated	2
<u>Unfounded</u>	<u>1</u>
Total	6

Inmate on Inmate Abusive Sexual Contact:

Substantiated	5
Unsubstantiated	7
<u>Unfounded</u>	<u>2</u>
Total	14

Inmate on Inmate Sexual Harassment:

Substantiated	4
Unsubstantiated	22
<u>Unfounded</u>	<u>4</u>
Total	30

Staff Sexual Misconduct (includes sexual contact, voyeurism, exposure, threat of sexual abuse):

Substantiated	0
Unsubstantiated	0
<u>Unfounded</u>	<u>18</u>
Total	18

Staff Sexual Harassment:

Substantiated	0
Unsubstantiated	3
<u>Unfounded</u>	<u>0</u>
Total	3

Effectiveness of PREA Efforts

Previous years saw a decrease in the overall number of reported allegations, but the number appears to have leveled off. In 2019 there were a total of 71 cases, 12 of which were substantiated (roughly 17%). In 2018 we investigated a total of 73 cases, 10 of which were substantiated (roughly 14%), showing a stable level of reporting and substantiated incidents. Staff training and inmate education continue to ensure that alleged incidents of sexual abuse and harassment are reported. Over the past year, the PREA team has increased our in-person visits with inmates, which provides another avenue for reporting issues. Mandatory training for supervisors who do PREA investigations also augmented staff understanding of the standard of proof and increased the quality of our administrative investigations and reports, both of which could be contributing to the slightly increased percentage of substantiated cases.

Progress in 2019

In the fall of 2018, the PREA team was reorganized and two full time officers were assigned, one for Del Valle and one for the downtown facilities. In 2019, these compliance officers increased compliance checks of facilities and procedures, in-person visits with inmates, and worked closely with security, behavioral health, and other staff on both immediate and longer term responses to sexual abuse and sexual harassment reports. We have an incredibly strong team that demonstrates this agency's commitment to eliminating sexual misconduct.

In the summer of 2019, we reevaluated how we were doing reassessment screening for risk of victimization or risk of perpetration of sexual abuse. The PREA standards require that all inmates be screened at intake and again within 30 days of intake. Screening at intake is done at booking within 72 hours of arrival. Rescreening was previously done by classifications when reassessing the inmate's custody level. We changed our practice to add an in-person visit with a non-uniformed officer to conduct a PREA-specific reassessment screening. To cover this workload, the PREA team added a part-time officer, who conducts the assessments, collects data, and works with classifications to rehouse inmates when needed for safety. This robust system ensures we are doing all we can to separate those inmates at high risk for perpetrating abuse from those inmates at high risk for being victimized.

In the fall, all housing unit sergeants, lieutenants, and captains underwent online and in-person PREA training that was specifically tailored towards investigating sexual abuse and harassment in TCSO facilities. The training covered investigation standards, trauma-informed investigation techniques, and recent case examples. These staff had already been trained on PREA investigations with a nationally used online curriculum, but this class gave us the opportunity to discuss some of the more difficult areas of witness interviews, administrative findings, and report writing. The value of this training has already been exhibited in recent investigations.

Continuing Areas of Focus and Improvement for 2020

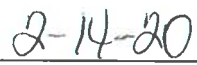
The PREA rules provide that facilities must be audited each three year cycle. In March of 2020, we will be undergoing our second round of PREA audits. The last audits were conducted in the fall of 2016, with certification reports issued in May 2017. We are currently preparing in earnest for the on-site portion of the audits, which will involve examination of facilities, documents, and numerous staff, inmate, and community partner interviews.

This year is also a PREA refresher training year (biannual schedule), so all current staff will be undergoing training over the summer. The training will cover agency policy, inmate and staff rights, sexual abuse dynamics, effective communication with vulnerable populations, and other topics. We will also be launching a new curriculum for the Corrections Officer Basic Recruit Academy, which should bring new life to our important basic staff PREA education.

Conclusion:

The Travis County Correctional Complex (TCCC) and Travis County Jail (TCJ) facilities proudly continue our PREA compliance and certification. We maintain a strong commitment to complying with all PREA standards, keeping inmates safe, and maintaining zero tolerance for all forms of sexual abuse and sexual harassment within our jail facilities.


Sally Hernandez, Travis County Sheriff


Date