



GEORGIA DEPARTMENT
OF JUVENILE JUSTICE

AVERY D. NILES, COMMISSIONER

A MESSAGE FROM THE OFFICE OF COMMUNICATIONS

Avery D. Niles, Commissioner

Jim Shuler, Director
Office of Communications



DEPARTMENT OF JUVENILE JUSTICE

3408 Covington Highway • Decatur, Georgia • 30032-1513
Telephone: (404) 508-7147 • Fax: (404) 508-7341

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CONTACT:

Jim Shuler, Director
DJJ Communications
(404) 508-7238

JimShuler@dj.j.state.ga.us

Commissioner Briefs Board Members:

DJJ “Making Steady Progress” Compiling Unfinished Caseload for Action

(MACON - GA) DJJ Commissioner Avery D. Niles met with the department’s Board in Macon Thursday for the first time since he announced he was suspending nineteen of the agency’s investigators with pay for their “alleged failure to carry out their duties in a timely manner.”

Just two weeks ago, a DJJ advisory committee discovered that nearly the entire roster of DJJ investigators failed to complete more than 20 internal investigations of sex abuse allegations assigned to them during 2012. The Commissioner ordered the staff suspensions because the sex abuse cases have remained unfinished for months longer than the 45-day deadline directed under state policy.

“The Governor gave me a mandate to reform and reorganize this agency when I was appointed,” Commissioner Niles told reporters this week. “Along with the coming institutional changes under the Juvenile Justice Reform law, DJJ staff should always expect to face this kind of consequence if they violate their positions of trust and responsibility.”

Commissioner Niles said the 19 staff suspensions were a necessary first step to restore credibility in the DJJ Office of Investigations before the agency can move forward for a closer look at the integrity of all reported sexual misconduct case investigations at DJJ.

Commissioner Niles says he had to take immediate corrective actions to ensure all department reports of sexual abuse and harassment are thoroughly investigated according to DJJ Policy and state and federal law. But the Commissioner refuses to speculate about how many open investigations the advisory committee may find or when he’ll be ready to make decisions regarding possible adverse actions in connection with dormant cases.

“We expect the final number of unfinished cases to be considerably higher,” Commissioner Niles said. “The advisory committee is making steady progress reviewing this incomplete caseload, but this is a process that ‘takes as long as it takes’ to do it right,” the Commissioner said.

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At Thursday's meeting at the Macon Youth Development Campus (YDC), the Commissioner briefed the DJJ Board about the recent federal survey which alleges Georgia has some of the highest rates of sexual harassment and abuse in juvenile detention centers in the nation. The Board then met for more than an hour in executive session to discuss pending personnel matters at the Department of Juvenile Justice.

"I won't tolerate any foolishness," Commissioner Niles told reporters following the Board meeting. "There is some complacency among these investigators. We're going to investigate these cases and where the chips fall, that's where they're going to lay."

The Commissioner has ordered his advisory committee to determine how many additional DJJ sex abuse investigations remain incomplete since 2012. "Youth safety is at stake and careers are in the balance. We will examine the job performance of each of our investigators and hear their explanations for these reporting delays," Commissioner Niles said.

Commissioner Niles has called in GBI and Department of Corrections agents to conduct independent follow-up investigations and to make certain that all open sex abuse cases are moved forward wherever there is evidence to support active prosecutions.

"These suspensions were a precaution, not a penalty," said Commissioner Niles. "We certainly weren't going to allow our investigators to investigate themselves. We wanted independent outside investigators examining our performance. That just makes sense," said Niles.

"We are gravely disappointed in this failure of accountability but we will remain focused on our goal to ensure a sexually safe environment for the youth in our care and custody," Commissioner Niles said.

The Department of Juvenile Justice maintains a contingent of 36 additional investigators who are assigned to each of DJJ's detention centers around the state -- and to a Security Management and Response Team (SMRT). Using this statewide staff of SMRT-Team and facility-based investigators, DJJ will continue to handle any new internal criminal complaints.

"DJJ will uphold its pledge to maintain a Zero Tolerance policy for P.R.E.A. violations," said Niles. "P.R.E.A." is the federal Prison Rape Elimination Act. Georgia's juvenile justice system remains a national leader for its use of innovative methods for integrating PREA programs for combatting sexual victimization.

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Jim Shuler

DJJ Director

Office of Communications

Office: (404) 508-7238

Email: jimshuler@djj.state.ga.us

