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January 15, 2010

Dear TYC Friends and Colleagues:

It is with a heavy heart, but a clear conscious that I bid y'all farewell.

I have taken a position with the Southern Poverty Law Center that will enable me to advocate for juvenile justice and school discipline reform all throughout the Deep South, primarily Mississippi and Louisiana.

Today is my last official day as Director of Special Projects for the Texas Youth Commission. However, I have assured Ms. Townsend and members of the Executive Management Team that I continue to be committed to the TYC reforms for which I have strived for more than four years. I will be glad to offer any assistance necessary in the future.

In earnest, I thank the many good people whom I have met and befriended at TYC for your kindness and support—even when we disagreed. I am also grateful to you for teaching me many valuable lessons. I've been an outside advocate/agitator for criminal justice and juvenile justice reform for about 20 years in several states and countries. This was the first time I've had the honor of working from within an agency. My eyes are forever opened.

I have learned that organizational change doesn't happen in a vacuum nor does it occur overnight. It takes months, even years of long hours, hard work and the deep commitment of many. I have a much clearer perspective as to the daily challenges juvenile justice professionals face, especially line staff. Yours is an intense, difficult vocation. I can now personally attest to the fact that a multitude of truly descent people within this agency are no less committed to the welfare of at-risk and incarcerated youth than *any* outside advocate. You all have made a commitment to toil each day and night for these youth, serving them directly for little remuneration. It's not just theory to you or the latest cause to rally behind. It is your reality. It is your passion. It is your life.

It is my honest personal and professional opinion that TYC is in the process of profound and lasting transformation. I have seen dozens of policies and procedures change to better align with evidenced-based, best practices. I see a new leadership at TYC that exhibits the best skill and knowledge that the modern juvenile justice field has to offer. And thankfully, many of the best TYC long-termers weathered the latest turmoil and remain.

The next phase of TYC reform must include a progressive shift in the hearts and minds of staff at every level of the agency. It will take time but it is inevitable. It is my true hope that the Texas legislature will give you the respect you deserve and the space you'll need to get there. I know in my heart you can.

There is always a swinging pendulum in the juvenile justice field, and TYC is on the positive end of an up-swing now. Embrace the moment. Don't resist reform. History will smile upon you. You hold the key to the future for many troubled youth. I honor you all for that. I wish you the best in your critical, righteous endeavor.

By close of business today this email address will be terminated, as will my position. Never hesitate to contact me at will.harrell@splcenter.org or yazoonative@gmail.com

Respectfully,

Will

PS

If you're in Austin this Saturday, come by the celebration and second line described in the attachment.

PPS

I attach my last special project report and urge y'all to see it through to fruition.

PPPS

I share with you the generous Proclamation sponsored by Senator Juan "El Comandante" Hinojosa and adopted today by the Texas Senate in my honor.