

HOUSTON CHRONICLE

Jan. 9, 2008, 4:10AM

New TYC conservator says his company won't bid for state jobs

© 2008 The Associated Press

AUSTIN — The Texas Youth Commission's new conservator said the nonprofit he manages has withdrawn from bidding for an agency contract and won't seek state business while he's in office.

Richard Nedelkoff, whom Gov. Rick Perry appointed in December to head the troubled state juvenile prison system, said he wouldn't want the involvement of Eckerd Youth Alternatives to raise questions about a conflict of interest.

Over the summer, Nedelkoff worked on Eckerd's first bid for a TYC contract. The company had been competing to provide services for boys ages 10 to 13 at a facility in Marshall in East Texas.

"I knew there would be a perception of a conflict ... so to remove that, Eckerd withdrew," Nedelkoff said. "It was the right thing to do. Eckerd will not be pursuing business with the state."

Nedelkoff, a former Texas criminal justice director under then-governor George W. Bush, serves as chief operating officer for Clearwater, Fla.-based Eckerd and plans to continue in that role while working for the state.

The private not-for-profit organization serves at-risk youth through residential and community-based programs in 10 states.

Spokesman Jim Hurley said the commission is considering about a dozen bids for the Marshall job.

State leaders ordered an overhaul of the youth commission last year to address a scandal stemming from the sexual abuse of inmates and agency mismanagement. New leaders have said they will consider using more contract care for the youngest offenders as a way to improve treatment programs and cut recidivism.

Rep. Jerry Madden, a Richardson Republican and co-chair of a special legislative committee overseeing reforms at the agency, commended Nedelkoff for removing Eckerd from state business.

"It's a wise idea, one that meets the higher standards that we want to see out there," Madden said.

Nedelkoff, the TYC's third conservator, said he expects to spend most of his time working with the agency, even though the conservator's job is considered part-time.

"TYC will be requiring a lot of time," he said. "It will be the most time-intensive, I'm sure. ... This is not an easy job, not an easy environment."

He said he will be paid about \$150,000 for his work for the state.

<http://www.chron.com/disp/story.mpl/ap/tx/5439535.html>