Crisis at COJC — We Need Transparency, Accountability, and Immediate Action

Dec 6



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE — Deep Concerns Remain for the Safety and Rights of Youth & Staff at COJC
Date: 12/5/25

Recent public reporting has revealed a severe and escalating crisis at the Central Oklahoma Juvenile Center (COJC), a secure-care facility in Tecumseh operated by the Oklahoma

Office of Juvenile Affairs (OJA). According to multiple news investigations:

- In recent weeks, a substantial percentage of COJC employees have been injured or placed on medical leave or workers' compensation following repeated violent incidents among residents. (Example reporting: https://nondoc.com/2025/10/24/with-workers-injured-at-youth-facility-cojc-in-tecumseh-faces-crisis-scenario)
- On separate occasions, external law-enforcement support was requested, yet was reportedly denied entry at the facility gates, even under 911 calls. (Report: https://nondoc.com/2025/10/24/with-workers-injured-at-youth-facility-cojc-in-tecumseh-faces-crisis-scenario)
- Staffing shortages are dire: back-office or kitchen staff have reportedly been forced into unit-duty roles, sometimes working 20-plus-hour continuous shifts, raising serious concerns about safety, oversight, and burnout. An OJA Board meeting on November 18, 2025 revealed that the facility is struggling to retain staff, and so a new contract has been established with a temp agency to fill staffing needs. (Coverage: https://www.yahoo.com/news/articles/policy-makers-strive-better-conditions-113524016.html)
- Most recently, multiple juveniles allegedly gained unauthorized access to restricted areas, resulting in injuries to both a guard and a resident. (Breaking news: https://kfor.com/news/local/tecumseh-pd-investigation-begins-after-two-injured-facility-secured)

- A concerned mother has also raised alarms publicly about facility conditions, including the treatment and safety of youth inside. This comes in the wake of previous reports that youth have been mistreated and inappropriately placed in solitary confinement in recent months.
  (Story:https://kfor.com/news/local/a-metro-mother-is-raising-concerns-over-juvenile-facility-conditions)
- These developments follow what many describe as a weeks-long pattern of unrest, instability, and operational breakdown, now widely characterized as a “crisis scenario.”

Leadership changes are already underway: the former OJA director resigned and interim leadership has been appointed. But leadership turnover alone will not solve the underlying systemic failures.

A more detailed analysis of Oklahoma’s longstanding issues in youth custody is also available via Oklahoma Appleseed’s prior reporting here: https://www.okappleseed.org/articles/central-oklahoma-juvenile-center-cojc.

Why This Matters for Youth, Staff, and the Community

COJC houses youth adjudicated delinquent or otherwise placed in state custody. That custody carries a solemn responsibility: to provide safety, rehabilitation, education, and

stability. When a facility meant to care for vulnerable youth becomes unsafe, understaffed, and chaotic, all those duties collapse at once.

Staff deserve a safe workplace. Youth in custody deserve humane treatment, structure, dignity, opportunity, and a chance at rehabilitation — not confinement in dangerous and deteriorating conditions.

The surrounding community deserves clarity and transparency when secure facilities lose control, become understaffed, and fall into operational disarray.

[CLICK HERE TO ADD YOUR NAME TO THIS CALL FOR CHANGE]

What We Are Calling For: Immediate, Transparent, and Independent Intervention

We call for the following immediate actions:

- **A full, independent investigation** of COJC by a neutral state or external body, with full access to records, staff, residents, and facility operations.
- **Public legislative hearings** with subpoena power, requiring testimony from OJA leadership, staff, former residents, community members, and oversight agencies.
- **Immediate interim safety measures**, including mandated staffing minimums, limits on forced overtime, and a prohibition on using untrained personnel (kitchen, admin) for unit duty.

Unannounced inspections and public transparency of safety metrics, including staff injury rates, violent incidents, youth assaults, use of segregation, educational hours provided, grievances, and outcomes.

A structural review of resident classification and placement, particularly where high-risk youth may be housed inappropriately due to age or lack of criminal history.

Long-term cultural change, including zero-tolerance policies for abuse, anonymous whistleblower protections, enhanced mental health supports, and external oversight that persists beyond the current crisis.

A Call to Action — We Need to Hear From You

If you are, or have been:

A COJC resident
A COJC staff member
A family member of a youth currently or previously housed at the facility
A contractor, medical provider, educator, or community advocate
A neighbor or observer with firsthand knowledge

We want to hear from you.

Your information may help protect young people and staff currently at risk.

Confidentiality will be respected, and anonymity is available upon request.

Please contact:
info@okappleseed.org

In Closing

The crisis at COJC is not an isolated breakdown — it is a systemic failure of oversight and accountability. It betrays Oklahoma's promise to provide safe, rehabilitative juvenile care. Our state cannot afford to turn a blind eye to escalating violence, severe staffing shortages, and deteriorating conditions.

Oklahoma's youth, staff, and taxpayers deserve better.

Now is the time for transparency.
Now is the time for accountability.
Now is the time for action.