

July 8, 2008

Mr. Sid Stell
Executive Director
Pottawatomie County Public Safety Center
14301 Highway 177
Shawnee, Oklahoma 74804

Dear Mr. Stell:

On April 1, 2008, the Office of Juvenile System Oversight (OJSO) conducted an unannounced visit to the Pottawatomie County jail to conduct a complaint investigation. The complaint received alleged that a juvenile inmate was not receiving proper medical attention and was not being provided with hygiene products. In addition, allegedly, the juvenile was being kept in seclusion, in a padded cell, and was not being allowed toileting privileges, when needed.

The OJSO interviewed the juvenile and the staff. The file on the juvenile was reviewed. The OJSO found that the juvenile was placed in the padded cell on the order of a member of the facility's medical staff. A "nurse's note" stated that the juvenile told the medical staff that "she was going to go off because of the meds." Staff reported that the intended use of the padded cell is for inmates who are a suicide risk. Documentation in the juvenile's medical record did not indicate that the juvenile was suicidal. Staff stated that the padded cell does not have a toilet, and inmates must rely on jail staff to take them to the restroom. Staff reported that the padded cell has a floor drain that can be flushed, and that inmates frequently use the drain for toileting purposes. The OJSO noted that the jail does not have policy and procedures regarding the use of the "padded cell." The OJSO recommends that staff establish policy and procedures regarding its use.

On the day of my investigation, I discussed my findings with you during the exit conference. I also shared my concerns regarding insufficient documentation by the security staff of incidents and members of the facility's medical staff making medical decisions for which they were not qualified. For example, although none of your medical staff are licensed nurses, staff decide when a juvenile inmate should be placed on and taken off of suicide watch. This is a concern, since staff have no formal training in this area, and there is a medical doctor on-call twenty-four hours a day for the facility.

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You indicated that you would immediately require that the facility's medical staff consult with the on-call doctor before a juvenile inmate was placed on or taken off of suicide watch. You stated that training would be implemented to improve the documenting of incidents by staff. The changes you have agreed to make will greatly improve conditions at the jail and will hold all parties more accountable.

I appreciate the attention you have given this matter. The OJSO will return at a later date to assess the progress being made and the effect the changes are having on the operation of the jail. A written response is not required. Please call my office at 606-4900 if you have any questions.

Sincerely,

Dana S. Holden
Oversight Specialist

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