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Prison Rape Elimination Act (PREA)

In 2003, the Prison Rape Elimination Act (PREA) was passed by the United States Congress and signed into law by President George W. Bush. PREA aimed to eliminate sexual abuse and sexual harassment in confinement facilities through a “zero-tolerance” policy. As a result, National Standards to prevent, detect, and respond to sexual assault and harassment in Juvenile facilities was published on May 17, 2012. Those facilities licensed under the Department of Human Services 3800 regulations whose children are housed overnight through the Juvenile Justice System have become required to meet all forty one federal standards of the PREA guidelines to maintain their license and continue to keep the children in custody safe and secure. As a result, effective August 20, 2014 the Department of Human Services (DHS) has mandated that each facility meet the required PREA federal standards. PREA audits are required to be completed every three years.

The Montgomery County Youth Center has always maintained a **zero- tolerance** stance against any form of abuse or harassment. Our mission is to provide a safe and secure environment for our youth while meeting their needs by offering an array of individualized services in a climate of respect and dignity. Youth Center employees have always and continue to report any suspected child abuse to the Pennsylvania Department of Human Services as Mandated Reporters. Furthermore, the Montgomery County Bureau of Detectives are fully responsible to conduct any and all potential criminal investigations.

On June 9, 2014, the Montgomery County Youth Center had its first mandated PREA inspection. Despite being the first inspection under the new federal standards, the Youth Center was found to be fully compliant with all forty one standards. Our second federal audit was completed on April 24, 2017. The audit was once again successful resulting in full compliance.

In addition to meeting all of the standards, our organization was found to exceed some of the standards as well. The previous inspections are a true indication of how seriously our organization takes the safety and security of the youth in our custody. Juveniles in our custody are provided with 24-hour direct supervision in both our detention and shelter programs. Each youth in our care is made aware of their rights under PREA to ensure full compliance and transparency. All audits are conducted using an instrument developed by the PREA Resource Center in conjunction with the Department of Justice.

In 2019, there were a total of three sexual harassment/ abuse allegations reported at the Montgomery County Youth Center. All three incidents being alleged were resident on resident in nature. As a result, all three allegations were reported to the Montgomery County Bureau of Detectives for a full investigation. The investigations resulted in two unsubstantiated and one unfounded case. All personal identifying information was redacted from those investigations. In 2018, to compare prior year data the center had no reported incidents of sexual harassment/ abuse at the Youth Center. The Montgomery County Youth Center continues to train all new and existing staff on prevention, recognition and reporting of any type of sexual abuse or harassment.

Joseph Viti
Executive Director-MCYC

