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mkim@rockdalenews.com
678-750-5037

Evening Reporting Center for juveniles to re-open

Stimulus and foundation funding received

The Evening Reporting Center, an alternative center for juvenile delinquents that has been suspended for about six months due to a lack of funding, may be able to reopen in a month with an infusion of stimulus grant funding, according to Rockdale County Juvenile Court Judge William Schneider

The center is a program of the Rockdale juvenile courts which was recently awarded a Byrne/JAG grant, which is part of the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act. Schneider said it costs about \$60,000 a year to run the program and that the grant would "assist with the hiring of a director" for the center along with other positions for the various courts.

The center also received some funding from the city of Conyers and the Rockdale County Sheriff, said Schneider, and from the Annie E. Casey foundation as part of their Juvenile Detention Alternative Initiative.

He said the courts may also have a future arrangement with the Department of Juvenile Justice to assist with keeping Rockdale juveniles in the community.

One place that the center did not receive funding from was the county, said Schneider, which he found "puzzling." He pointed out BOC Chairman Richard Oden had been the head of the ERC for a year and had touted the center during his campaign.

"I don't understand why Richard Oden, who has made his political fortune off the Evening Reporting Center, says 'sorry, we have no money,'" said Schenider.

He added that he had requested \$15,000 and was previously denied.

The county recently cut over \$300,000 from the requested 2010 budgets of outside agencies and non-profits, including Rockdale Emergency Relief and Rockdale Cares.

At a recent legislators forum, resident Brian Jenkins asked Oden about the county not funding the ERC.

Oden responded, "We continue to support the program with the facility, a county facility. We do not charge rent for the facility, we do not charge for the telephones, we do not charge for the lights. We support them in kind through those contributions."

"Their dollars come from other various sources, through grants and supportive agencies. I'm still a strong proponent of the youth programs," he said, pointing out the Summer JOBS program for teens earlier in the year.

The Evening Reporting Center is a juvenile court program that allows kids in the court system to avoid having to go into a detention center as they are awaiting trial and instead report to the Evening Reporting Center from 4 p.m. to 9 p.m. where they can receive academic assistance and enrichment activities.

"A child placed in detention has a higher potential to reoffend than a child that's never seen the inside of a detention center," explained Schneider. "Being placed in detention "changes a child's outlook and value system."

The program began two years ago with grants from the Governor's Office of Youth Coordinating Council, which no longer exists, and donations from community organizations, such as the Rotary Club, local businesses, and the Department of Juvenile Justice.

In other juvenile court business:

The courts also received a grant from the state Administrative Office of the Courts to set up a juvenile drug court that would open within the next several weeks, said Schneider.

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