



# COMMENTARY: A CIVIL SERVICE CRISIS IN TEXAS

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*A Role of Government* LIFT Commentary

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## *A Limited Government LIFT Commentary*

There is a civil service crisis in Texas that demands a complete and thorough review by the Legislature before any more people suffer and die at the hands of state employees.

The appalling revelation this week that employees at the Corpus Christi State School goaded severely mentally handicapped residents into fighting each other is just the latest in a string of abuses perpetrated by state employees. The Texas Department of Aging and Disability Services (DADS) confirmed that seven state employees have been placed on emergency leave after police reviewed video evident of the alleged abuse.

Incredibly, these allegations come after the Corpus Christi State School was the subject of an investigation by the U.S. Department of Justice (DOJ). As noted in the *Caller-Times* (March 11, 2009), a 2007 report by the DOJ addressed “allegations of abuse voiced by Corpus Christi State School residents.”

Since at least 2004, mentally retarded persons have been neglected and abused under the watch of, and sometimes at the hands of, state school employees.

The 2007 DOJ study found “systemic deficiencies” throughout the 13 state schools that house nearly 5,000 residents. The study pointed out that “residents have suffered significant injuries from inadequate supervision, neglect and possible abuse,” noting that 53 deaths at state schools were due to preventable conditions that were “often the result of lapses in care.”

Figures released by the state reveal that there were 574 confirmed cases of abuse and/or neglect at state schools in 2008.

Despite these warning signs, there was evidently insufficient concern for the wellbeing of state school residents on the part of state employees both at the institutions in question and DADS for the necessary oversight and protections to be put in place. The state failed in its obligation to provide a basic standard of care to the school’s residents, or even to afford those residents basic human decency.

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DADS is not the only agency in very recent years to fail the people they are sworn to protect. The pattern of malfeasance and abuse at state institutions, including the Department of Family and Protective Services, the Texas Youth Commission and the Department of Public Safety, confirms that there is a crisis in the public sector in Texas. It is a crisis that periodically makes front page news – typically when shocking abuses are revealed – yet for the most part is obfuscated by well-orchestrated campaigns by public employee unions for higher pay and benefits.

Despite the Texas state school system being the subject of a federal investigation and a declared emergency legislative priority by Governor Rick Perry, the public employee unions are notably silent on the issue.

The Texas State Employees Union (TSEU) and Texas Public Employees Association (TPEA) fail to address the issue of state school reform in their 2009 legislative priorities. TSEU predictably calls for the cancellation of Human Services privatization, while TPEA calls for “general pay raises,” apparently in the belief that criminal behavior and widespread abuse are cause for financial reward.

TPEA also manages to announce its “All State Employee Celebration” (April 2, in Austin), inviting all state employees to enjoy complimentary drinks and bring a state ID to gain entrance to the celebration. However, with the Texas public sector in crisis and an epidemic of abuse at state schools, there really isn’t anything to celebrate.

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The fundamental problem with public employee unions is that the supposed prerogatives of the bureaucrat are placed above the clear needs of program beneficiaries and often to the detriment of the taxpayer. State workers may occasionally be fired, but ultimately the same systems and management structures remain in place.

After repeated episodes in which state workers have failed to do their job, the case for comprehensive civil service reform is stronger than ever.