



April 1, 2005 - *In this issue- Truancy Editorial and truancy Bill Update, Scholarship Application Deadline Approaches, New addition for JCJ Annual State Conference.*

THE LIST

An Editorial on Truancy By Judge Jim Hansen

Most juvenile offenders I see only once. But about one out of every ten offenders comes back to my Court with a new charge, and about one in twenty comes back over and over on multiple charges. I believe these repeat juvenile offenders represent an opportunity that is ignored in most Texas Counties. In 30 years in the courthouse (15 as a J.P.) I have seen several cases where today's repeat juvenile offenders become the career criminals of tomorrow as they get older.

At risk juveniles are easy to identify in J.P. Courts. I liken it to being given a list of youths with the greatest probability of becoming a future hardened criminal. What do we do with the list? Unfortunately, with few exceptions, we do nothing. District Courts, Juvenile courts, and District and County attorneys across Texas are "too busy" to be burdened with J.P. cases. J.P. cases are not important enough to merit attention. As a result, we as J.P.s are given few, or maybe no options, to deal effectively with repeat offenders. In fact we are ordered to "butt out" on repeat offenders, and send them to higher Courts where, more often than not, nothing happens.

The lesson this gives to juvenile offenders is that the more crimes they commit, they more they learn nothing happens. They are educated early that an overburdened criminal justice system will often allow them to slip through the system with little or no punishment. In my County, a first time juvenile shoplifter often gets far more attention than a five time shoplifter. It just doesn't make sense, but it has remained that way for a long time. Once the juvenile commits a murder, robbery, or rape, the higher Courts will get involved, but not until that time.

I can recall hearing of only one or two counties where the J.P.s are satisfied with the performance of juvenile court judges or the D.A.'s handling of repeat juvenile offenders. The issue of compulsory attendance and repeat juvenile offenders is the one that continues to cause the most frustration for Texas Peace Justices.

To their credit, a handful of legislators are trying to add teeth to the process. A few years back when a law passed allowing us to send certain juvenile cases "upstairs", the response in many Texas Counties was swift, sure, and negative. In my County, the Board of District Judges thwarted the effort on these matters by requiring the J.P. Courts to jump through various paperwork hoops. Once we did the paperwork, the cases were shipped off to Juvenile probation, where they were given low priority. Nothing happened and we quit sending them upstairs. Not one juvenile offender from J.P. Court ever appeared before a Judge upstairs.

If the legislature is going to require us to hear juvenile cases, they must put some teeth in the law to deal with these repeat offenders. We (meaning legislators, schools, juvenile probation, all Judges, District and County Attorneys, and law enforcement) need to pay more attention to the kids on "the list". While HB 3010 is not the answer, it is a good start.



TEXAS JUSTICE COURT JUDGES ASSOCIATION



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TRUANCY

House Bill 3010 is of interest to many Judges who have complained about a “lack of teeth” in a Judge’s enforcement power for truancy court orders. This bill, by State Representative Kent Grusendorf, would allow a Justice of the Peace to commit a truant in contempt of a court order for up to three days in certain circumstances. It would also *require* juvenile courts to accept properly filed Justice Court referrals.

A full review of HB 3010 is available here:

Link to Bill: [http://www.capitol.state.tx.us/cgi-](http://www.capitol.state.tx.us/cgi-bin/tlo/textframe.cmd?LEG=79&SESS=R&CHAMBER=H&BILLTYPE=B&BILLSUFFIX=03010&VERSION=1&TYPE=B)

[bin/tlo/textframe.cmd?LEG=79&SESS=R&CHAMBER=H&BILLTYPE=B&BILLSUFFIX=03010&VERSION=1&TYPE=B](http://www.capitol.state.tx.us/cgi-bin/tlo/textframe.cmd?LEG=79&SESS=R&CHAMBER=H&BILLTYPE=B&BILLSUFFIX=03010&VERSION=1&TYPE=B)

NEW COURSE ADDITION FOR ANNUAL CONFERENCE

Our annual conference is set for July 12-15, 2005 in wonderful Austin, Texas. Make plans to attend now! The complete agenda and registration form are available at the website at www.tcja.com. We have added a special course on the electronic registration of death certificates that will be taught by Steve Elkins of the Texas Vital Statistics office. We will have more on this exciting new technology in the near future. The Texas Justice Court Judges Association is your association, organized specifically to benefit Justice Court judges and court clerks. Take an active role! Attend the Conference committee meetings, where policies and procedures are developed and discussed for education, legislative efforts, information technology, and scholarships and awards. You’ll have a voice in these meetings. As a member of JCJ, you’ll also have a vote at our Annual Business Meeting on these important issues.

Last, but certainly not least, is the opportunity to meet and network with fellow judges and clerks! We guarantee you’ll find an abundance of camaraderie, hospitality, and friendship at the Conference! We want to meet you and hear your ideas on ways to improve the office of Justice of the Peace.

Make your plans now to attend the Texas Justice Court Judges Association Annual Conference! A registration form is provided at the end of this newsletter!

2005 JCJ SCHOLARSHIP DEADLINE APPROACHES

It is time to think about nominations for the 2005 Texas Justice Court Judges Association Scholarship! The \$500 scholarship will be awarded to a high school graduate or college student who is a child or grandchild of a JCJ Association member in good standing. The scholarship is not restricted to a particular field of study. The deadline for scholarship applications is May 1st. If you have more scholarship questions, contact Judge Becky Kerbow at Becky.Kerbow@dentoncounty.com.

The scholarship application, along with a full list of 2005 Legislation, should be posted at the website tomorrow, or you can email for an application of a list of legislation at jhansen@co.lubbock.tx.us.

OF NOTE- THE INQUEST SCHOOL IN LUBBOCK MAY 19, 2005 IS FULL!! That is all for now!