



PRESS RELEASE
For Immediate Release
February 1, 2018

The National Association for Civilian Oversight of Law Enforcement (NACOLE) Responds to the Surprise Removal of Independent Ombudsman Debbie Unruh

In recent years, and throughout 2017, Texas Juvenile Justice Department Independent Ombudsman Debbie Unruh issued a series of reports that drew widespread attention to significant problems within Texas juvenile lockup. This included reports of sexual abuse, staff misconduct, and other serious mistreatment of juvenile detainees. On January 30, 2018, news reports were published indicating that Texas Governor Greg Abbott had removed Ms. Unruh from her position as Independent Ombudsman, without explanation.

One of Ms. Unruh's key responsibilities as Independent Ombudsman was providing transparency about conditions within juvenile lockup, and the reporting that she has done exemplifies her commitment to that work. It also highlights the risks that those who provide independent oversight undertake in their professional lives. As the nation's preeminent association of oversight agencies and practitioners, we are very troubled by Governor Abbott's decision to remove Ms. Unruh without specifying the cause. Ms. Unruh's excellent service to the people of Texas has consistently exhibited the transparency, independence and outreach outlined in NACOLE's code of ethics for civilian oversight. We call on Governor Abbott to provide — and urge Texas legislators to demand — a full and transparent explanation of Governor Abbott's decision. Without such an explanation, the public can only conclude that Ms. Unruh, who did her work without fear or favor, was targeted because she spoke out and exposed problems that some might prefer remain hidden.

About NACOLE: The National Association for Civilian Oversight of Law Enforcement (NACOLE) is a nonprofit professional association that brings together individuals and agencies working to establish or improve oversight of police officers and detention facilities. NACOLE establishes best practices, provides training, and coordinates among oversight agencies to enhance the quality of civilian oversight in the United States.

###

NACOLE Media Contacts:
Brian Corr or Liana Perez: 317.721.8133

P.O. Box 87227 ♦ Tucson, Arizona 85754 ♦ (317)721-8133
E-mail: info@nacole.org ♦ Website: www.nacole.org