

# SCSL Digital Collections

## Improving the Juvenile Grievance Delivery Process

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# **Improving the Juvenile Grievance Delivery Process**

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## **Introduction**

The South Carolina Department of Juvenile Justice (DJJ) is a state cabinet agency that is responsible for providing custodial care and rehabilitation for the state's youth who are incarcerated, on probation or parole or in a community placement for a criminal or status offense.

The mission of DJJ is to protect the public and reclaim youths through prevention, community programs, education and rehabilitative services in the least restrictive environment possible.

(South Carolina Department of Juvenile Justice, 2019)<sup>1</sup> This project will review several of the alternative placements across the state used by DJJ to serve juveniles in a less restrictive environment.

The Office of Juvenile and Family Relations (OJFR) is responsible for receipt of complaints, grievances and allegations received from juveniles, parents, legal guardians, elected officials and staff. A grievance is defined as a written or oral complaint filed by a juvenile or other involved person concerning an incident, policy, practice or condition within a facility, program, school, medical unit or county office (SC Department of Juvenile Justice, 2019). The goal of OJFR is to be a liaison to assist in bringing resolutions to complaints and allegations received. Juvenile and

<sup>1</sup> SCDJJ Website, <https://djj.sc.gov/sites/default/files/Documents/DJJ%20Resource%20Guide%20Final%20Draft%20FOR%20WEB.pdf>

<sup>2</sup> <https://djj.sc.gov/facilities>

Family Relations Coordinators (JFRC) are impartial advocates for juveniles by investigating complaints and grievances through the juvenile grievance process. JFRC are also responsible for the retrieval of grievance forms from all secure DJJ facilities and marine and wilderness camps located across the state. (Appendix 1)

## **Background**

The current grievance process begins with a juvenile completing a Juvenile Grievance/Allegation Appeal Form. A juvenile would place the completed grievance form in a locked grievance box located in multiple areas within the facilities. The grievances are collected from the boxes by a JFRC assigned to the facility. Collection of the grievances are different in the marine and wilderness camps. The boxes are checked by a JFRC at least twice a week for locations within the midlands area. Due to these programs being located throughout the state, grievances are collected from the alternative placements of the marine and wilderness programs by one JFRC in conjunction with assistance from the Executive Director (ED) of each camp or their designee. The camps are required to check the grievance boxes daily (Monday through Friday), collect grievance forms and email them to the JFRC daily. The JFRC will review the grievance to decide if the complaint is appropriate for investigation or if it should be forwarded to the Office of Inspector General or management for investigation. If the grievance is appropriate for the OJFR, the JFRC will begin an investigation.

The following is a description of DJJ's secure facilities. The Juvenile Detention Center (JDC) is a centralized pre-trial detention facility located in Columbia, South Carolina serving juveniles from several of South Carolina's 46 counties. JDC is a secure, short term facility providing custodial care and treatment to male and female juveniles ages 11 to 17 that have been detained

by the family courts and law enforcement agencies prior to the court's finding of action to be taken. Juveniles who have been charged with serious and violent charges who are awaiting trial are also placed at JDC. DJJ has three (3) Regional Evaluation Centers, Midlands Evaluation Center (MEC), located in Columbia, SC, Coastal Evaluation Center (CEC), located in Ridgeville, SC and Upstate Evaluation Center (UEC), located in Union, SC. These facilities provide court-ordered evaluations for adjudicated juveniles, comprehensive psychological, social and educational assessments to direct the court's disposition of cases. By law, the length of stay for adjudicated juveniles cannot exceed 45 days. The Broad River Road Complex (BRRC) located in Columbia, South Carolina, is the agency's long-term commitment facility. Male and female juveniles reside at the complex. Programs are provided to the juveniles with different needs to include substance abuse, youth sex offenders and juveniles with special needs. DJJ also has a fully accredited school district that provides education for the students for post-secondary education. Birchwood High School is located inside BRRC and male and female juveniles attend middle and high school. (SC Department of Juvenile Justice, 2019)<sup>3</sup>

DJJ also offers alternative placement for certain juveniles as an option of placement in a secured facility. DJJ has a range of community based residential services with the goal of keeping youth in the least restrictive environment. These placements, which are located throughout the state, include therapeutic foster care, intermediate and intensive group care marine and wilderness programs and independent living programs. (SC Department of Juvenile Justice, 2019)<sup>4</sup>

DJJ has also collaborated with private providers to develop alternative marine, wilderness and

<sup>3</sup> <https://djj.sc.gov/facilities>

<sup>3</sup> <https://djj.sc.gov/facilities>

special treatment programs that offer services for juveniles who are committed to DJJ, on probation or parole status. (Appendix 1) Services provided to juveniles placed at these facilities vary depending on the needs of the juvenile. This project will focus on eight (8) of the marine and wilderness camps: Camp Aspen, Clemson Youth Development Center, AMIKids Georgetown, AMIKids Sand Hills, AMIKids Bennettsville, AMIKids Beaufort, AMIKids Piedmont Wilderness and AMIKids White Pines.

Camp Aspen is a privately-operated therapeutic wilderness program located in Columbia, South Carolina. The facility serves male offenders referred by DJJ. The mission of Camp Aspen is to provide youth offenders with an experience that addresses criminal behavior, personal accountability and substance abuse. They are dedicated to returning youth to their families and the community with a heightened awareness of personal integrity, diminished defiant behavior, improved social functioning and enhanced life skills.<sup>4</sup>

Clemson Youth Development Center (YDC) is a collaboration between The Youth Learning Institute of Clemson University and DJJ. This program provides behavioral, emotional, educational and vocational interventions and specialized programming designed for females ages 12-18 years old that is gender specific. Treatment includes theme-based programming, positive therapies, life skills/independent living skills and self-esteem development.<sup>5</sup> (SC Department of Juvenile Justice, 2019)

AMIKids has six (6) camps located across the state that provide services to male juveniles involved with DJJ. Each camp is a private nonprofit, staff-secure residential facility. The

<sup>5</sup> <https://djj.sc.gov/facilities>

program operates 24 hours a day, seven days a week, serving young men who have committed a variety of non-violent offenses. The juveniles live in dormitories on campus. Each camp provides different programs and services to treat each juvenile's unique issues and assist them in gaining skills needed to return to their families and communities. The primary focus is on education, behavior modification and treatment. (AMIKids.Org, 2019)<sup>6</sup>

## **Problem Statement**

The juvenile grievance process should provide a confidential, timely and fair resolution of complaints. OJFR has one JFRC assigned to nine (9) marine and wilderness camps located throughout the state of South Carolina. In order to comply with policy, grievances must be received from the marine and wilderness camps scattered throughout the state within 24 hours of receipt. It is unfeasible for one person to travel to each location daily to collect grievances. The JFRC spends numerous hours each week traveling to camps to collect grievances. Many work hours are lost weekly traveling on a rotating basis to each camp. This issue has directed the agency to approve the assistance of the Executive Director (ED) the responsibility of collecting grievances from the grievance box from each camp daily and forwarding them to the JFRC. This process has caused some delays in receiving the grievances within 24 hours of receipt. The project goal would align with DJJ strategic goals of enhancing services to improve long-term outcomes for system-involved youth and families and enhancing IT processes and agency applications for efficient operations. This project would assist in finding an alternative in submitting a grievance that would provide more confidentiality to the juvenile. Currently, a third party, ED or designee) from each camp has access to grievances forms submitted by juveniles.



The JFRC spends numerous hours traveling to the camps to collect grievances. The research for the Certified Public Managers (CPM) project will serve to evaluate the current processes for collecting juvenile grievances and provide suggestions for improvement. Many grievance forms from the marine and wilderness camps are not received within 24 hours of collection. The goal of this project is to improve efficiency of the grievance process and reducing the delay of receipt of grievances from marine and wilderness camps located outside of the central office location (Columbia, SC).

## **Data Collection**

The goal of this project was to obtain data to determine if there is a lapse of delivery time of grievances between marine and wilderness camps and DJJ secure facilities located in the central area. Three months of grievance collections from the three OJFR Coordinators was gathered from local facilities and marine and wilderness camps located outside of Columbia, SC. The Executive Directors and juveniles of marine and wilderness camps participated in surveys with questions of the current juvenile grievance process. Data was collected from the JFRC visiting camps each month to determine the number of hours traveled. Information and data from the following camps were used for data collection: Camp Aspen, Clemson Youth Development Center, AMIKids Georgetown, AMIKids Sand Hills, AMIKids Bennettsville, AMIKids Beaufort, AMIKids Piedmont Wilderness and AMIKids White Pines. The following DJJ secured facilities were used for data collection: Broad River Road Complex (BRRC), Midlands Evaluation Center and Juvenile Detention Center.

The Executive Directors' survey (Appendix 2) was compiled using SurveyMonkey where participants were emailed the survey and answers were submitted to project writer. The survey

was mailed to seven (7) Executive Directors of the marine and wilderness camps. The survey was composed of 10 questions with one question giving the participants an opportunity to answer the question on a scale of one to five (1-5) with one being the least satisfied and five being the most satisfied. The other questions gave the participants a choice of “yes” or “no” responses and the remaining questions provided a comment box for answers. The survey gave the participants an opportunity to provide their opinions on the juvenile grievance process.

The grievance process affects the juvenile population and a juvenile survey (Appendix 3) was issued to obtain their opinions of the current process and an automated system. The survey was delivered to juveniles in the AMIKids programs and Clemson Youth Development Center and Camp Aspen. Juveniles received a paper survey containing six questions about the juvenile grievance system and the number of questions was limited in order to keep the attention span of the juveniles to complete the survey. The survey was anonymous. Some juveniles added comments to their answers. The results were received via email from the Executive Directors of each camp.

## **Data Analysis**

Data was collected for three months (August 2019, September 2019 and October 2019) from the OJFR database to determine if there was a difference in the collection time of grievances from the local facilities (BRRC, MEC, JDC) and the marine and wilderness camps located throughout the state. Data received from the facilities (Appendix 4) produced an average of lapse time of grievances being written and received as follows:

BRRC: August – 2019 – 2.83 days, September 2019 – 2.95 days, October 2019 – 3.45 days

MEC: August 2019 – 2.0 days, September 2019 – 1.75 days, October 2019 – 1.0 days

JDC: August 2019 – 2.75 days, September 2019 – 2.0 days, October 2019 – 2.25 days

Camps: August 2019 – 7.0 days, September 2019 – 4.12 days, October 2019 – 2.5 days

Camps did have the highest lapse (Appendix 5) in receiving grievances, however, there were also lapses in receiving grievances from the local facilities. Some contributing factors for the high percentage in the camps would be the location of the camps and the use of non-DJJ staff to collect grievances. There was also a low amount of fourteen (14) grievances received within three months. A potential cause of the high percentages in collection with the local DJJ facilities would be that the grievance boxes are checked twice a week which would cause a delay in receiving the grievances. While policy implicates the OJFR and/or designed SCDJJ staff is responsible for collecting grievances from each unit no less than twice a week. The policy states that a County Office or community-based facility or program, which would include marine and wilderness camps, must ensure that grievances are faxed or emailed to the OJFR within 24 hours of receipt. Per policy, the grievances at the camps are to be checked daily. A possibility of the lapse for both areas is that juveniles may not write the correct date on the grievance form and when they are collected the date is not consistent to the actual date of receiving the grievance.

The juvenile grievance process surveys given to the Executive Directors received a participation rate of 100%. The responses were mostly positive. The responses did reveal that grievance boxes are not checked daily with 14% of the camps. This would also explain a lapse in receiving the grievances in a timely manner. Two responses as challenges for not checking the grievance boxes daily: “Just something you have to remember in the daily hustle of things.” and “None, it’s a pretty simple task. I do know that the individuals responsible (2) sometimes are on the same schedule and the boxes may not get serviced. I have witnessed prior kids filling grievance in advance however when received the date are not congruent to the actual timing of receiving the

complaint.” There was an 83% satisfaction rate of the current grievance system. There was conflicting information when the participants were asked about an automated grievance system and the juvenile use of the automated system. When asked if they would support an automated grievance system, 43% answered “yes” and 57% answered “no”. When asked if they believed an automated grievance system would encourage more juveniles to use the system, 57% answered “yes” and 43% answered “no”. 57% participants believe juveniles would increase juvenile participation and 57% participants would not support an automated system. The concern of protecting hardware (computers/tablets) for the automated system may be a factor in the high percentage of not supporting an automated system. Some responses for suggestions of how to protect the hardware were the following: “I don’t have the answer for this one. We already have a hard time protecting the hardware on the computers in our lab.” and “I am unsure. Juveniles and technological software always has proven difficult in a facility setting.” Protecting equipment with juveniles has and is a problem in all facilities but some responses recommended supervision, a private room and supervision in one location.

The juvenile survey had one-hundred and thirty (130) participants. Most of the participants answered all questions. Only six (6) questions were not answered from the participants. The first question of the survey asked the juveniles to rate the current process from a scale of one (1) to five (5) with five (5) being the most satisfied. The responses revealed that 19% of the juveniles were satisfied with the process while 24% were not satisfied with the process. One comment for this question was, “It takes too long to get to authorities.” The second question asked if the juveniles were comfortable submitting grievances when there was an issue or problem. The responses revealed that 56% were comfortable submitting a grievance and 22% were not comfortable while 22% were not sure. Some comments received for this question were:

“Because I’m not a snitch.”, “Nothing happens.”, “Sometimes it takes too long for them to be looked at.” Some comments revealed retaliation from staff or other juveniles if a grievance was completed. The fifth question asked the juveniles to rate their comfort level or submitting a grievance electronically (on a computer/iPad) from a scale of one (1) to five (5) with five (5) being the most satisfied. The responses revealed that 53% of the juveniles would be comfortable submitting grievances electronically, 22% would not be comfortable and 33% were not sure if they would be comfortable submitting a grievance electronically. The last question asked if the juveniles would submit grievances more often if they used a computer or tablet and 45% responded “yes”, 22% responded “no” and 33% responded “not sure”. The data has revealed issues of juveniles not trusting the grievance process and making accusations of retaliation from staff and other juveniles. Juveniles are open to an automated process for grievances and it could reduce threats or retaliation of juveniles completing paper grievance forms.

## **Implementation Plan**

Following the review of the lapse of days from writing a grievance to the collection of the grievance for the camps and the DJJ secure facilities, it was determined that the process needs to be streamlined in order to receive the grievances quicker in order to assist the juveniles with their issues in a timely manner. The surveys conducted by the Executive Directors of the camps and the juveniles from the camps also proved that the process could use a checklist for the collection of the grievance forms. A refresher training of the grievance process is needed for the Executive Directors of the camps to ensure that grievance boxes are checked on a daily (Monday – Friday) basis. Documentation of these daily checks should be completed via email each day by the Executive Director/or designee and emailed to the juvenile grievance email address. This should reduce the delay of receiving grievances from the camps.

With there being a lapse in collection of grievances from DJJ secure facilities also, a grievance box log should be created for OJFR Coordinators for documentation of collection days for each facility. This would ensure that each grievance box is checked at least twice a week. A review of Policy 920, Juvenile Grievance Process, is recommended to ensure that there is no conflicting language involving the collection of grievances at the marine and wilderness camps and the DJJ secure facilities.

One major implementation issue would be to create a juvenile allegation and grievance portal or application to be used on a desktop computer, tablet or laptop. This portal would streamline the current systems and processes within the area of OJFR. Ashley Crider, Business Analyst for Strategic Operations/Information Technology division of DJJ was interviewed on May 7, 2019 and completed a telephone conference call on January 24, 2020 to discuss the potential of creating an electronic process for the grievance process. Ms. Crider presented an initial plan for this project. The portal would be web-based and accessible from a wide-range of devices such as desktop computers, laptop, iPads/tablets. This would be a stand-alone system that would have back-end connections to the agency's Juvenile Justice Management System (JJMS) and the Event Report System (ERS). Phase 1 of the project would provide a portal which would be accessible by juveniles currently placed in DJJ contract placements (marine and wilderness camps). Juveniles would be able to report and submit the details of his/her grievance or allegations and their desired outcome via this portal. OJFR staff would have access to the system and would be able to view all grievances and allegations submitted. The juveniles would only be able to view their own submissions. Phase 2 of this project would replace the current Grievance and Allegations database by providing additional functionality which would allow OJFR staff to manage the grievances and allegations they receive, assign cases, document outcomes and

communicate these outcomes back to the juvenile. Phase 3 would expand this system to juveniles held in secure DJJ facilities. Before this can be done, devices must be identified and purchased that can be secured to avoid damage and theft. It is also important that these devices are easily accessible by juveniles and provide an acceptable level of confidentiality. Ms. Crider provided the estimated time required to complete the development of the portal would be 800 hours. The estimated development cost of this project would be \$32,000. This price represents the cost of the developer's time to complete the project and no additional funds would be needed for this portion of the project.

Ms. Peggy Sease, Desktop Support Supervisor for Strategic Operations/Information Technology division of DJJ was contacted on January 13, 2020 via email to request the equipment costs for the devices that would be needed for the juvenile grievance portal. The cost of equipment for the use with the portal would be as follows:

Dell Desktop \$688.00 + Monitor \$180.00 = \$868.00

Dell tablet \$1725.00

Dell Laptop \$ 803.73 includes bag.

Apple iPad \$ 250.00

The cost will be a major factor in bringing this project to fruition. With that in mind, the choice of an Apple iPad would be the most cost-efficient device and with one being needed at each camp, would be a total cost of \$2,000. There would also be additional cost of a protective cover to prevent damage to the device.

Some potential obstacles for the creation of the juvenile grievance portal is cost. A potential resource for funding of this project would be securing a grant. There could also be savings in a

potential cost share with the marine and wilderness camps. The use of this process would release staff from this daily duty of collection of grievances. This would also reduce the travel of the OJFR Coordinator in traveling around the state collecting grievances. Her work time would be used to complete juvenile and staff interviews of grievances.

Mr. Rickie Hardy, Regional Director of AMIKids was interviewed on January 28, 2020 regarding the juvenile grievance process. Mr. Hardy agreed to ensuring that each Executive Director of the AMIKids programs would submit a daily email documenting that grievance boxes were checked and submit any grievances that were collected. Mr. Hardy also agreed in the request of using new Juvenile Grievance and Allegation forms that include a box for staff to document the date the grievance was collected from the box. He would inform the directors during the Monday meeting on February 3, 2020 of the requested processes. Mr. Hardy was explained the juvenile portal project and stated that he is on board with the automation of the submission of juvenile grievances. He stated this process would make it easier for everyone. He believed the portal would increase juvenile participation in the process.

## **Evaluation Method**

A post survey to the Executive Directors will be the evaluation method utilized to determine the effectiveness of the addition of documentation of the grievance boxes being checked daily. Data will also be collected from the database to determine if the lapse time of receiving grievances has decreased. Data will be collected and analyzed from the juvenile grievance box log completed by OJFR coordinator for DJJ secured facilities.

A post survey to juveniles placed at the marine and wilderness camps to determine if their opinion of the grievance process has changed. A travel log will be created to collect data on



travel and collection of grievances for DJJ facilities and camps. A proposal of the juvenile grievance portal will be presented to DJJ's Inspector General William Littlejohn for evaluation.

Training is also necessary for staff and juveniles to understand the grievance process. The survey illustrated that several juveniles are not satisfied with the process. Information of the process may transform the opinion of the juveniles. An examination of the influence from modifying policy and procedures will be conducted.

## **Summary and Recommendations**

This project was conducted to explore possible delays of receiving grievance forms collected from wilderness camp facilities. Camps had a high lapse of receiving collected grievances, however; the project discovered there was also a delay in receiving grievances from the local DJJ facilities. The staff Executive Directors' survey revealed that 14% of the camps do not check the grievance boxes daily. The survey also revealed 57% of the participants would not support an automated grievance system. Some concerns were protecting the equipment from being damaged by the juveniles. Participants believed an automated system would increase juvenile participation in the grievance process.

The juvenile survey revealed that on 19% of the participants were satisfied with the grievance process and 24% were not satisfied with the process. The responses discovered that 56% of the participants were comfortable submitting grievances and 22% were not comfortable. Some comments regarding submitting a grievance were that juveniles did not want to be considered a "snitch" or that "nothing happens". 45% of the participants reported they would be comfortable submitting grievances with an automated system.

While there is no way to provide total anonymity to juvenile submitting a grievance, the creation of an automated grievance system would provide more confidentiality to the juvenile. The possibility of creating a juvenile grievance portal/application is possible. Discussions with DJJ IT personnel has created an initial plan for the project. There may be some financial obstacles but the possibility of searching for grants and the proposal of cost sharing could decrease the initial cost of the project.

Training of staff and juveniles of the grievance process is needed. Misconceptions of the process by juveniles has placed the process in an ostracized light. The implementation of creating checklists and documentation of collection of grievances will improve the approval rating of the juvenile grievance system.

## **Glossary**

**Juvenile** – a person, male or female, ages 12 – 18, who has been adjudicated delinquent in family court and has been ordered to be involved with DJJ for services or commitment to a facility.

**DJJ** – the cabinet agency of South Carolina state government that is responsible for providing custodial care and rehabilitation for the state’s youth who are incarcerated, on probation or parole or in a community placement for criminal or status offenses.

**OJFR** – Office of Juvenile and Family Relations is a section of the Division of Investigative Services responsible for receipt of complaints, grievances and allegations received from juveniles, parents, legal guardians, elected officials and staff.

**Grievance** – a written or oral complaint filed by a juvenile or other involved person concerning an incident, policy, practice or condition within a DJJ operated facility, program, school, medical unit or county office.

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# Facilities

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## **Staff Survey - Juvenile Grievance Process**

**1. Are juveniles informed of the grievance process upon arrival?**

- Yes
- No

**2. Are grievance boxes checked on a daily basis?**

- Yes
- No

**3. What kind of challenges are encountered in the process of checking the grievance boxes on a daily basis and forwarding the grievances to the Juvenile Grievance email?**

**4. Is there a dedicated staff member responsible for checking the grievance boxes?**

- Yes
- No

**5. Please identify staff(s) responsible for checking the grievance boxes daily.**

**6. On a scale from 1 to 5 (5 being most satisfied), how satisfied are you with the grievance system?**

**7. What other methods (i.e. peer mediation, conflict resolution) are presently available to allow the juveniles to resolve complaints?**

**8. Would you be willing to support an automated grievance system?**

- Yes
- No

**9. Do you believe an automated grievance system would encourage more juveniles to use the system? w 0**

- Yes
- No

**10. How would the hardware (computers/tablets) of an automated system be protected from being vandalized by juveniles?**

Juvenile Survey

Camp: \_\_\_\_\_

1. On a scale from 1 to 5 (5 being the most satisfied), how would you rate the current grievance process?

1      2      3      4      5

2. Are you comfortable submitting grievances when there is a problem or issue?

Yes                  No                  Not Sure

Comments:

3. Would you know where to find grievance forms?

Yes                  No                  Not Sure

4. Could you complete a grievance form when needed? If no, why?

Yes                  No                  Not Sure

Comments:

5. On a scale from 1 to 5 (5 being the most satisfied), how comfortable would you be submitting grievances electronically (on a computer/iPad)?

1      2      3      4      5

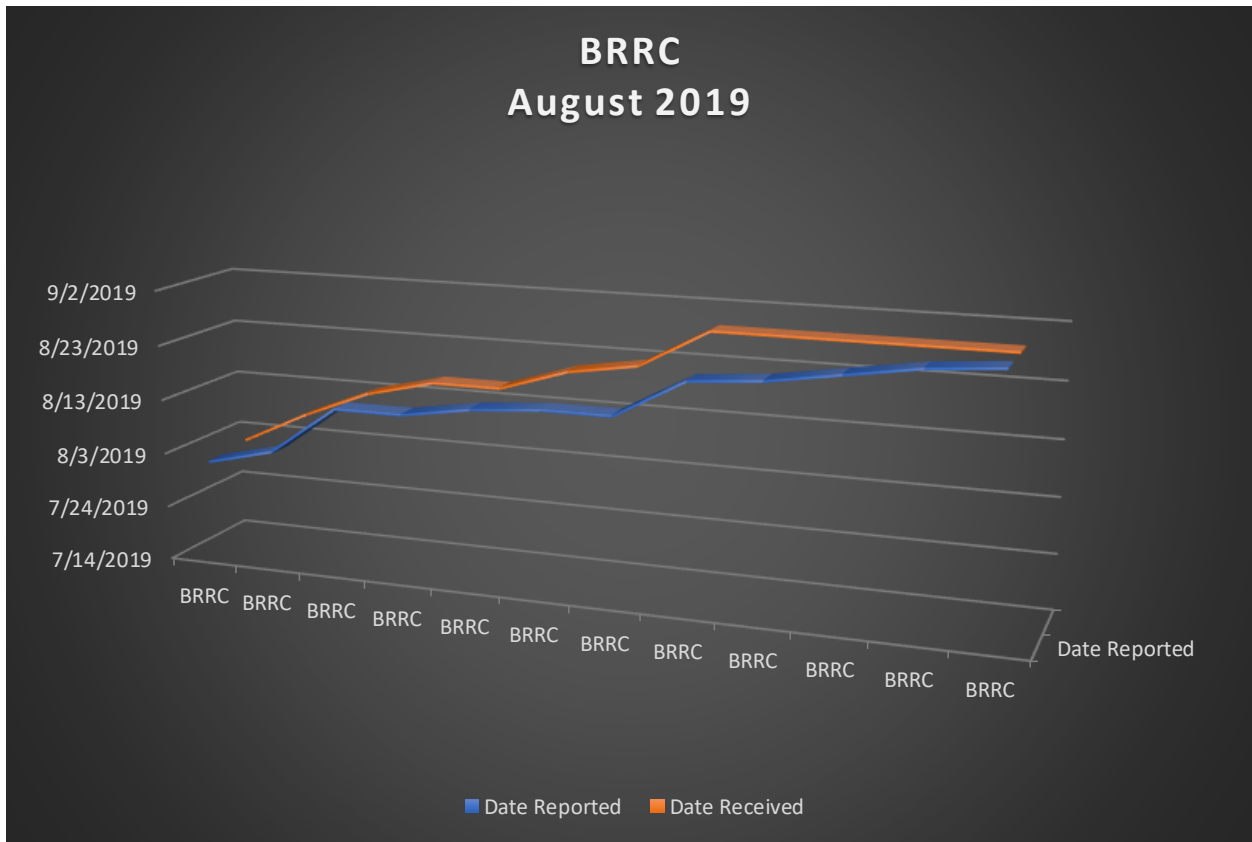
6. Would you submit grievances more often using a computer or tablet to submit a grievance form?

Yes                  No                  Not Sure

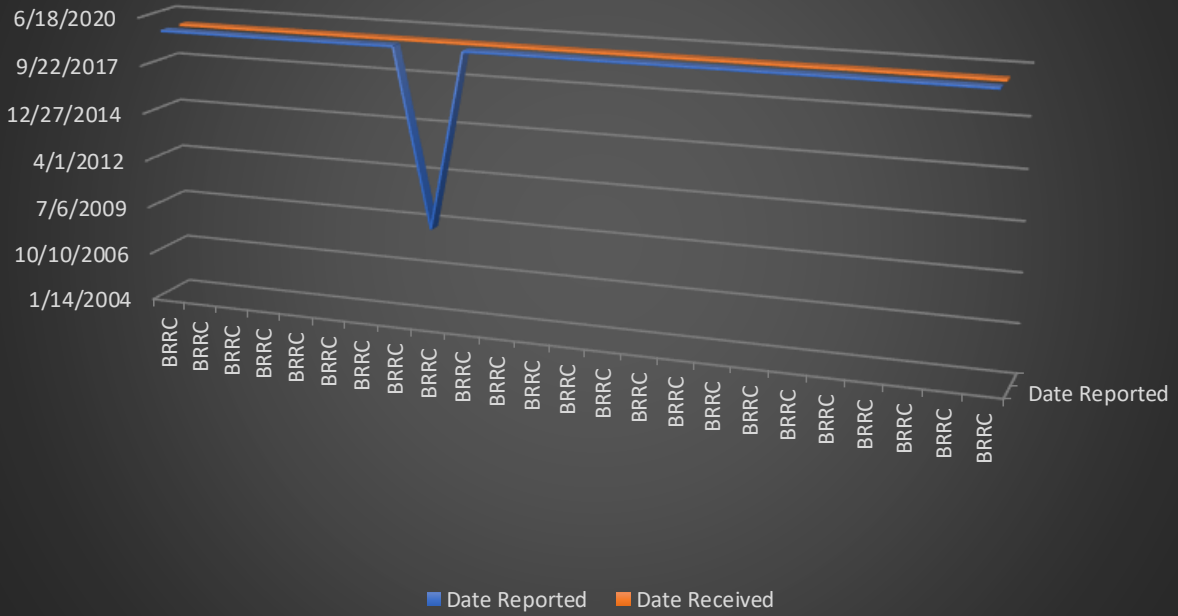
**Thank you for your participation!!!!!!**



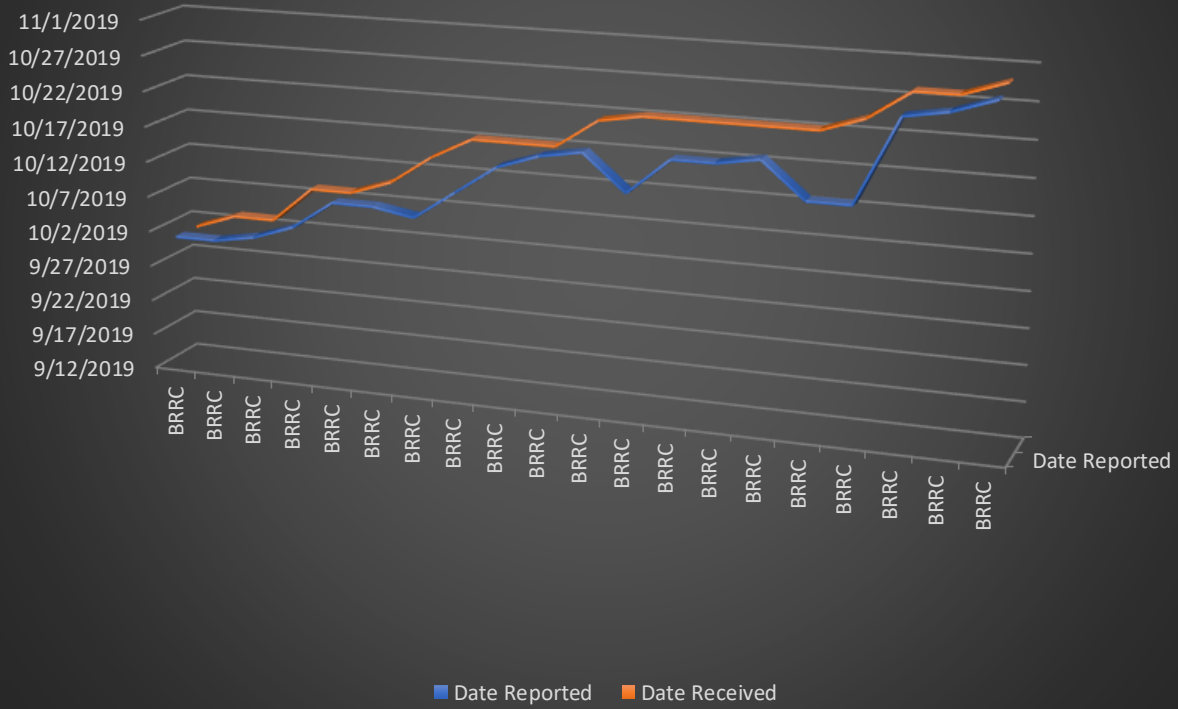
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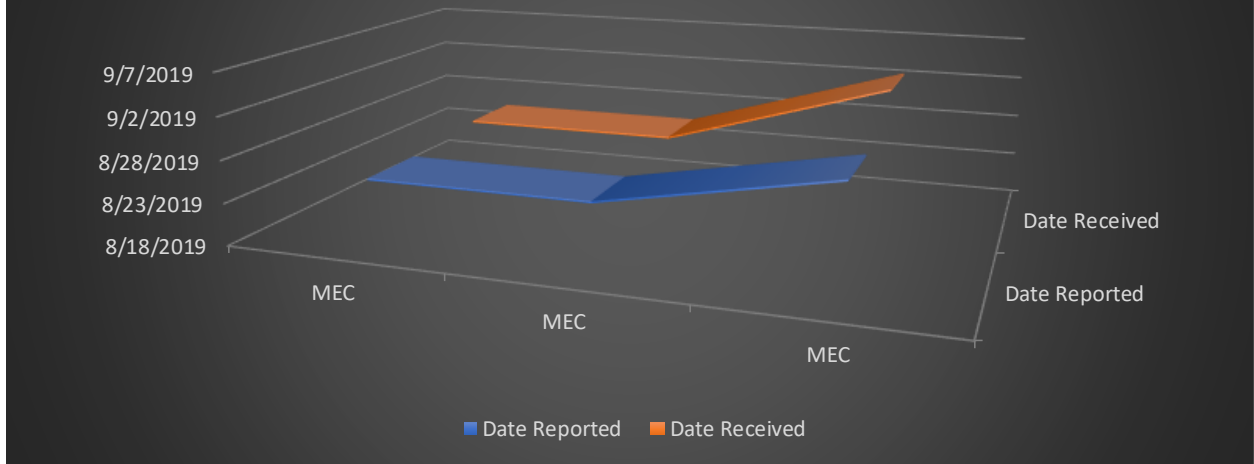
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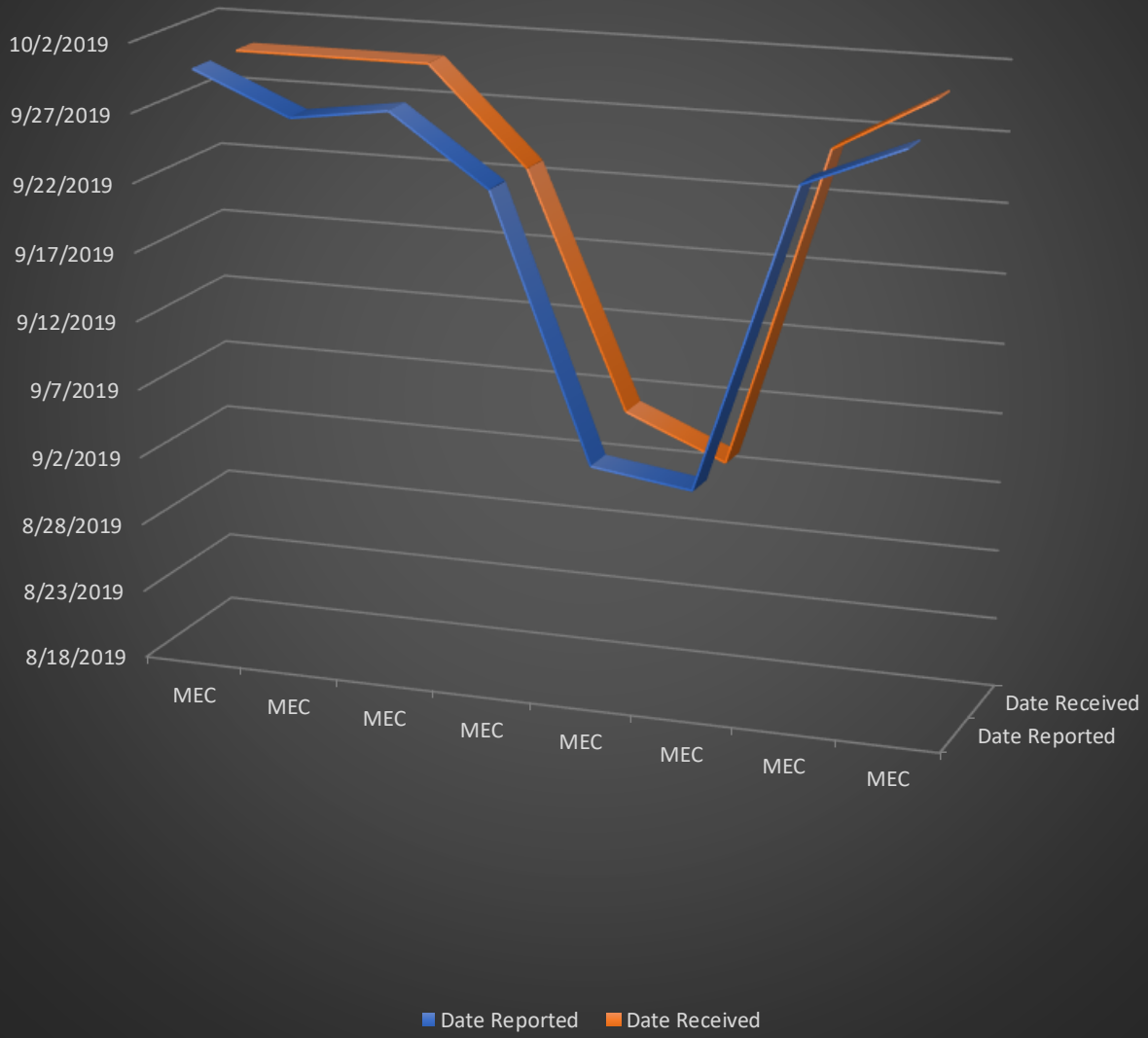
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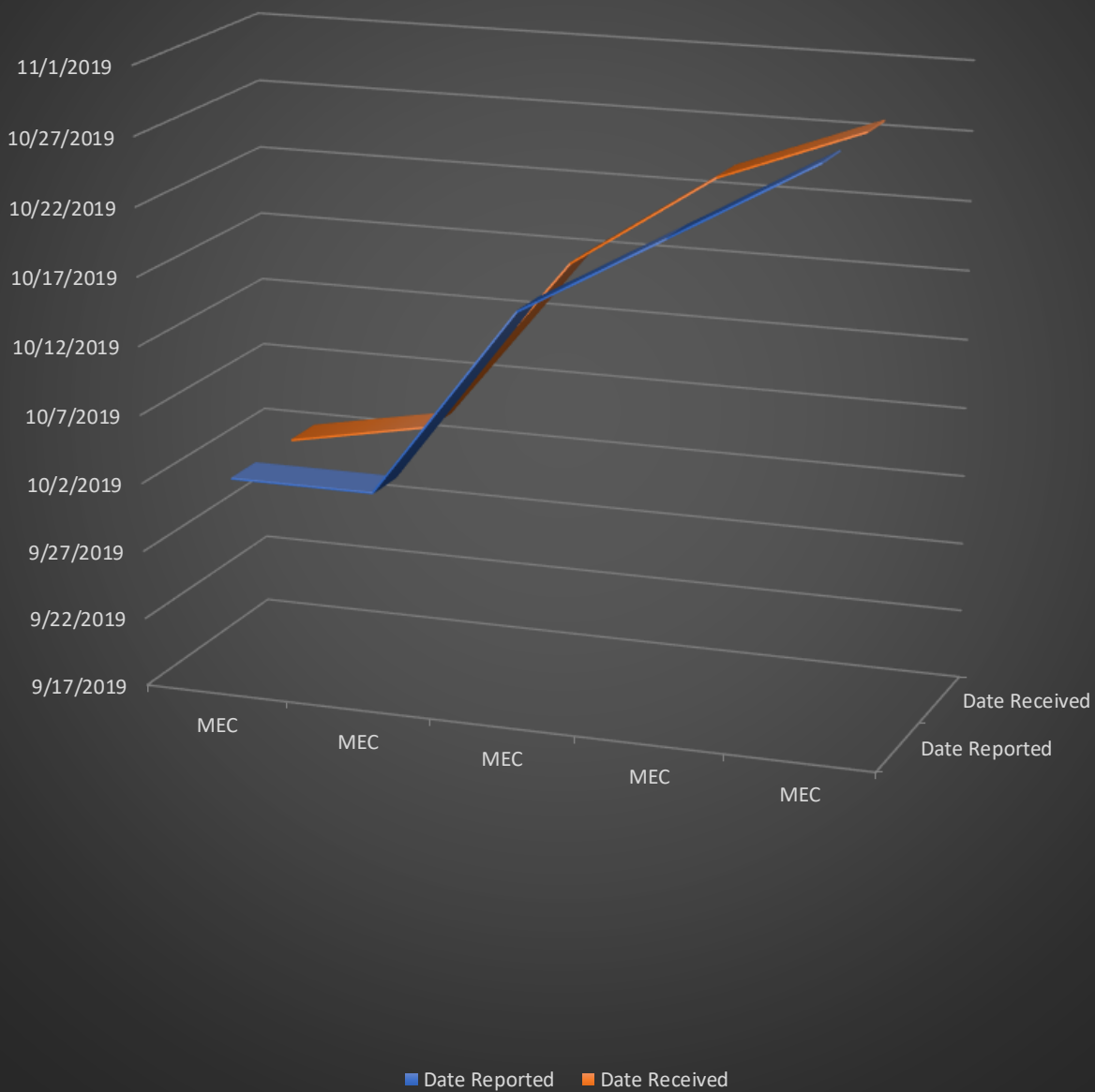
# MEC-August 2019



# MEC-September 2019



# MEC-October 2019



# Camps-September 2019

