



U.S. v. Georgia



JI-GA-002-009

STATE OF GEORGIA

OFFICE OF THE GOVERNOR

ATLANTA 30334-0900

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REMARKS BY GOVERNOR ZELL MILLER Justice Department, 3/18/98

It is an honor to be here today with U.S. Attorney General Janet Reno and Bill Lee, head of the Justice Department's Civil Rights Division, along with our Attorney General Thurbert Baker and Juvenile Justice Commissioner Gene Walker.

I want to take this opportunity to welcome both Attorney General Reno and Bill Lee to Georgia, and I thank them both for finding the time to be with us today to announce this historic agreement on juvenile justice.

I am an admirer of Attorney General Reno; she is one of my personal heroes. I believe she brings great honor and dignity to the Office of Attorney General, and I'm very pleased she could be with us today.

I also want to commend Bill Lee for his role in today's agreement. He has been very fair with us during these negotiations, and I appreciate very much the professional manner in which he handled this matter.

We have reached a great agreement. It protects the state's interests and protects the rights of juveniles. I am committed to seeing it through.

When the Justice Department issued its report one month ago, I was somewhat upset by the results.

But these negotiations have been fair and productive. I wanted the chance to make the state's case and not be pre-judged by anyone, and we've been given that chance.

And I want it clear that the justice officials, and Bill Lee in particular, made a big difference.

We have worked together honestly and directly these last few weeks, and I have come to admire Mr. Lee's approach to issues.

Had I known all this before, I would have written him a different response than the one I did. I will now write him a second letter commending his leadership in the Civil Rights Division.

Before I outline the agreement, I want to say a few words about Commissioner Gene Walker and Attorney General Thurbert Baker.

Nobody cares more about those kids than Gene Walker. This is a big man with a big heart.

He is dedicated to those kids, and he has helped us make progress in one of the toughest jobs in Georgia.

There is no better man to implement these new programs than Gene Walker, and I wanted him to know that today.

We would not be here today without the skills of our Attorney General, Thurbert Baker. He has taken the lead on these negotiations, and today's settlement is a testament to his skill and ability as a negotiator. I want to thank you for a job well done.

Today's agreement announcement makes several important points.

First, this agreement recognizes this administration's cooperation with the Justice Department.

Second, this agreement preserves the state's interest in protecting the safety of the public, the staff of DJJ and juveniles.

Third, it allows Georgia to determine its own philosophy in dealing with juvenile justice, a philosophy based on tough love and discipline.

Fourth, this agreement preserves our boot camp program.

Fifth, with this agreement there is no federal takeover of our system nor is there a court monitor. The state of Georgia runs our juvenile justice agency, and OPB will monitor compliance with this agreement.

In exchange, the state of Georgia will build upon our progress with significant new resources and programs for mental health, education and medical services.

Specifically, we will hire an additional 238 positions, primarily teachers, juvenile justice officers and counselors. For FY 99, that will mean an additional \$10.8 million for services on top of our previous commitment.

Second, we will expand our capacity to ease overcrowding. And this will also include alternative programs for juveniles who are now in RYDCs.

Third, we will create three new state positions in the DJJ and require that they be hired from outside the agency. They are: a Director of Education; a Director of Mental Health; and we will create an Office of Quality Assurance within the agency to oversee and implement this agreement.

Finally, OPB will hire an independent contractor to monitor state compliance. Both parties will jointly select the monitor, who will be independent.

All told, we project these improvements will cost \$44 million over the next three years, with an additional \$21 million in bonds. Any costs associated with population growth are not included in this agreement.

I believe all sides win in this agreement, and that is why we are gathered here today.

Georgia will continue to run its own agency with its own philosophy, while agreeing to enhance medical, educational and mental health programs and build upon the progress we've already made to give juveniles who deserve it a second chance.

Now it is an honor to present to you our U.S. Attorney General, Janet Reno.