PINE
HILL

COUNCIL OF GOVERNMENTS

Foreword

Texas is vast and diverse, with each region facing unique challenges and opportunities in public safety and criminal justice. From urban centers to rural communities, we share a collective responsibility to ensure our justice systems are fair, effective, and responsive to local needs. This Criminal Justice Strategic Plan represents a coordinated effort across our region to strengthen public safety, support victims, reduce recidivism, and address the root causes of crime. Guided by community input, regional data, and the expertise of our criminal justice partners, this plan identifies priority areas for investment and collaboration. It reflects our commitment to a balanced approach—one that values prevention and intervention alongside enforcement and accountability. We have engaged law enforcement agencies, courts, corrections, juvenile justice professionals, victim advocates, behavioral health providers, and community stakeholders to build a strategy that is both inclusive and actionable.

As our region continues to grow and evolve, so must our strategies. This plan is not a static document, but a roadmap for progress—anchored in data, informed by those on the front lines, and adaptable to emerging needs. Whether responding to mental health crises, supporting at-risk youth, or enhancing reentry efforts, our goal remains the same: to build safer, stronger communities across Texas.

We thank everyone who contributed their time, insight, and dedication to this important work. Together, we are advancing a vision of justice that is equitable, collaborative, and locally driven.

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George Lopez
Executive Director,
Pine Hill Council of Governments
8/21/2025

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Executive Summary (Sample Narrative)

This Criminal Justice Strategic Plan for the [Region Name] Council of Governments identifies the most critical needs in criminal justice, juvenile justice, victim services, and mental health/substance use services within the region. The purpose of this plan is to provide a roadmap for improving system coordination, closing service gaps, and supporting evidence-based solutions that promote safety and recovery across communities.

The planning process was collaborative and data-driven. Input was gathered from law enforcement, courts, probation, victim advocates, service providers, schools, and nonprofit organizations, as well as citizens directly impacted by the justice system. Regional data sources—including arrest and conviction trends, juvenile referrals, jail population statistics, and victim services utilization—were analyzed to identify needs and gaps. Community meetings and surveys provided additional insight into how existing resources meet or fail to meet the needs of local residents.

Top Five Critical Needs

Through this process, stakeholders identified the following five most urgent needs:

1. Expanded access to mental health and substance use treatment to reduce recidivism and provide alternatives to incarceration.

2. Improved coordination of victim services, including crisis response and long-term support for survivors of domestic violence, sexual assault, and human trafficking.

3. Enhanced juvenile justice programming, with a focus on prevention, diversion, and family-based interventions to reduce juvenile system involvement.

4. Stronger reentry supports for individuals returning from incarceration, including housing, employment, and case management services.

5. Technology and data improvements to strengthen information-sharing among law enforcement, courts, and service providers.

Role of the Plan

This plan provides the framework for the Criminal Justice Advisory Committee (CJAC) to use when prioritizing funding recommendations for grant programs. It also guides local partners in aligning resources with shared goals. By focusing on the most critical needs, the region can make strategic investments that improve outcomes for justice-involved individuals, victims, and the broader community.

Planning Process in Brief

The planning process followed a structured approach:

- Community Engagement: Over 50 stakeholders from law enforcement, courts, schools, health care, nonprofits, and advocacy groups participated in meetings, surveys, and interviews.
- Data Analysis: Regional statistics from the Texas Department of Public Safety, Texas Juvenile Justice Department, and local service providers were reviewed.
- Gap Identification: Service gaps were identified in areas such as rural victim services coverage, jail diversion options, and technology capacity.
- Prioritization: Needs were discussed and ranked by the CJAC to ensure alignment with local priorities and state requirements.

Through this process, the region developed a clear picture of its most urgent challenges and opportunities. This Executive Summary presents the highlights, while the full plan provides detailed analysis, stakeholder feedback, and implementation strategies.

1. Community Engagement in the Planning Process

The [Example Region COG] placed a strong emphasis on community involvement and stakeholder engagement throughout the development of this Criminal Justice Strategic Plan. The goal was to ensure that the identified priorities reflect not only regional data, but also the lived experiences and perspectives of the communities most affected by the criminal justice system.

Public Input Opportunities

The COG hosted three public meetings across the region—in Example City, Riverbend, and Pine Hill—to allow residents to share their concerns and suggestions. A regional survey was distributed online and in paper form, receiving 482 responses. Participants identified drug-related crime, lack of mental health services, and gaps in victim support as top concerns. Feedback from these sessions was incorporated directly into the gap analysis and shaped the identification of the region's top five needs.

Stakeholder Representation

The planning process included structured engagement with representatives from:

- Law Enforcement: Police chiefs and sheriffs reported rising calls involving behavioral health crises and stressed the need for crisis intervention training.
- Schools: School counselors emphasized the increase in youth experiencing trauma and the need for prevention and diversion programs.
- Victim Service Providers: Local advocacy organizations reported high demand for emergency shelter and counseling for victims of domestic violence.
- Mental Health and Substance Use Providers: Regional boards highlighted the shortage of detox and treatment beds, particularly in rural counties.

These stakeholders participated in focus groups and contributed written feedback that was used to refine identified priorities.

Underserved and Vulnerable Populations

To ensure equity in the planning process, the COG conducted targeted outreach to rural residents, Spanish-speaking populations, and individuals with lived justice involvement. Surveys were translated into Spanish, and a listening session was held with formerly incarcerated individuals who emphasized the barriers they face in securing housing and employment. Rural residents noted long travel distances for court and treatment services, while survivors of crime highlighted the need for trauma-informed response in law enforcement and courts.

Ongoing Communication and Collaboration

The COG engaged its standing Criminal Justice Advisory Committee (CJAC) to review findings at each stage of the planning process and confirm that community input was

accurately represented. This committee will continue to meet quarterly to monitor progress, assess whether priorities remain aligned with community needs, and provide ongoing feedback.

Impact on Priorities

Community input had a direct impact on the final priorities outlined in this plan. For example:

- After feedback from victim advocates, the plan added a priority need for expanding access to 24/7 crisis counseling.
- Input from rural residents led to the inclusion of transportation assistance as a priority, ensuring access to court and treatment services.
- Law enforcement and mental health boards' feedback elevated crisis intervention training to a top regional priority.

Through this engagement process, the plan reflects a broad and inclusive set of voices that will guide funding decisions and program development across the justice continuum in the [Example Region].

2. Data Sources Used to Support the Plan
The planning team utilized a wide range of quantitative and qualitative data sources to ensure the Criminal Justice Strategic Plan reflects the realities and needs of the [Region Name] region. These sources provided insight into crime trends, juvenile justice issues, mental health and substance use prevalence, and the availability of victim services.

Key data sources included:
- **Uniform Crime Reports (UCR), Texas Department of Public Safety (2021–2023):** Used to identify regional trends in violent crime, property crime, and drug-related offenses.
- **Texas Juvenile Justice Department (TJJD) Data (FY2020–2023):** Provided information on juvenile referrals, dispositions, and probation populations in the region.
- **Mental Health and Substance Use Data, Texas Health and Human Services Commission (HHSC):** Regional prevalence rates of depression, opioid misuse, and co-occurring disorders.
- **Local Law Enforcement and Court Statistics:** Arrests, jail bookings, court caseloads, and sentencing outcomes from county sheriff's offices and district courts.
- **Community Needs Assessments (2022):** Conducted by local health departments and non-profits, capturing community perceptions of safety, behavioral health needs, and access to victim services.
- **Victim Services Agency Reports (2023):** Case data from domestic violence shelters, sexual assault programs, and child advocacy centers.

Presentation of Data:
- Key crime rate trends (2019–2023) are shown in **Figure 1 below**.
- A detailed table of juvenile referral trends is included in **Appendix A**.
- Graphs showing mental health prevalence compared to state averages are provided in **Appendix B**.

Overall, the data reveal that violent crime in the region increased by **12% from 2019 to 2022**, juvenile referrals declined by **8% over the same period**, and self-reported substance misuse among youth remains **above the state average**. Community needs assessments highlighted gaps in trauma-informed services for victims, particularly in rural areas. These findings directly informed the priority needs identified in Section 5 of this plan.

3. Stakeholder Participation

This section provides a record of the individuals and organizations that actively participated in the development of the Criminal Justice Strategic Plan. The Pine Valley Council of Governments engaged a broad range of stakeholders to ensure the plan reflects regional needs across the justice continuum.

Stakeholder Group/Individual	Name/Organization	Role in Planning
Law Enforcement Agency	Smith County Sheriff's Office	Provided arrest and jail statistics; attended regional planning workshop
Victim Service Provider	Safe Haven Women's Shelter	Shared service gaps and survivor needs during focus group
Juvenile Justice Professional	Pine Valley Juvenile Probation Department	Provided data on juvenile referrals and case outcomes
Behavioral Health Provider	Pine Valley Community Mental Health Center	Supplied data on mental health and substance use prevalence; recommended service improvements
CJAC Member	John Martinez, CJAC Chair	Reviewed data, participated in prioritization workshops, and guided funding recommendations
Community-Based Organization	Pine Valley Youth Outreach	Participated in stakeholder survey; provided input on prevention needs

4. Gaps in Criminal Justice Resources and Regional Priorities

This section outlines the most significant gaps in criminal justice resources within the Pine Valley Council of Governments region and identifies the corresponding priorities and strategies to address them. By linking each gap to a proposed priority action, the region ensures that planning efforts are both evidence-based and solution-oriented.

Adult Criminal Justice

Category	Description of Gap	Impact	Priority Need	Proposed Strategy/Action
Jail Overcrowding	The county jail is operating at 120% capacity.	Overcrowding increases safety risks and strains staff resources.	Reduce jail overcrowding.	Expand diversion programs and implement pre-trial release options.
Reentry Services	Few reentry programs exist to support individuals returning from incarceration.	High recidivism due to lack of employment and housing support.	Enhance reentry services.	Develop partnerships with local employers and housing providers.
Court Case Backlog	Delays in court processing due to limited staffing.	Extended pre-trial detention and delayed justice.	Improve court efficiency.	Request additional judicial staff and explore virtual hearings.

Juvenile Justice

Category	Description of Gap	Impact	Priority Need	Proposed Strategy/Action
Juvenile Diversion Programs	Limited access to early intervention programs for at-risk youth.	Increased recidivism and school drop-out rates.	Expand juvenile diversion opportunities.	Partner with schools and non-profits to establish mentorship and restorative justice programs.
Mental Health Services for Youth	Lack of licensed mental health providers for juveniles.	Youth with behavioral health needs enter the justice system instead of	Increase access to youth mental health services.	Fund school-based counseling and expand telehealth options.

		receiving treatment.		
Juvenile Detention Facilities	Aging facilities with inadequate space for programming.	Limited opportunities for rehabilitation and education inside detention centers.	Upgrade juvenile detention facilities.	Seek state and federal funding for facility renovations and program space.

Victim Services

Category	Description of Gap	Impact	Priority Need	Proposed Strategy/Action
Domestic Violence Shelter Capacity	Shelters regularly turn away victims due to lack of space.	Victims may return to unsafe environments, increasing risk of harm.	Increase access to safe housing for victims.	Apply for VOCA funding to expand shelter bed capacity and transitional housing options.
Victim Advocacy	Shortage of trained victim advocates in rural counties.	Victims lack guidance navigating the justice system.	Expand advocacy services.	Recruit and train volunteer advocates and expand regional service coverage.
Human Trafficking Victims	Few specialized services for human trafficking survivors.	Victims remain vulnerable to re-exploitation.	Improve services for trafficking victims.	Develop partnerships with specialized non-profits and expand trauma-informed care.

Mental Health and Substance Use

Category	Description of Gap	Impact	Priority Need	Proposed Strategy/Action
Substance Use Treatment	Insufficient inpatient treatment facilities for opioid addiction.	High relapse rates and strain on emergency services.	Improve access to substance abuse treatment.	Develop regional partnerships to increase residential treatment options and recovery support services.

Crisis Response Services	Limited crisis intervention teams to respond to mental health emergencies.	Law enforcement becomes the default responder, leading to unnecessary arrests.	Enhance crisis response capacity.	Expand mobile crisis teams and integrate co-responder models with law enforcement.
Continuity of Care	Lack of coordination between jails, courts, and community mental health providers.	Individuals leaving custody often experience gaps in treatment and medication access.	Strengthen continuity of care.	Implement data-sharing agreements and discharge planning protocols.

5. Use of the Strategic Plan by the CJAC

This section should describe in detail how the Criminal Justice Advisory Committee (CJAC) will use the strategic plan in its decision-making process. Including bullets is acceptable, but each item should also have a narrative explanation describing its role in the prioritization process, implementation, and long-term use.

The plan should demonstrate how the CJAC will:

- Prioritize grant funding – Explain how the CJAC will apply the plan to ensure funding decisions directly address the region's most critical gaps and needs.
- Align project selection with strategic needs – Describe how project proposals will be evaluated against the plan's identified priorities to promote fairness and consistency.
- Promote transparency and data-informed decisions – Show how the plan provides a transparent framework that allows stakeholders to understand why certain projects are funded.
- Guide future evaluations and updates to the plan – Discuss how the plan will be revisited and updated (e.g., annually or every biennium) to reflect new data, emerging needs, and stakeholder input.

Implementation and Future Use:

- Detail how the CJAC will incorporate the plan during meetings, scoring, and deliberation processes.
- Explain how the plan will guide not just current funding decisions but also long-term strategies for system improvement.
- Identify when and how the plan will be updated (e.g., after major data releases, changes in state priorities, or every 2 years).
- Note how the plan will remain a "living document" to ensure ongoing relevance and usefulness.

Fictional Example Narrative

The Pine Valley Council of Governments (PVCOG) Criminal Justice Advisory Committee (CJAC) uses this strategic plan as the foundation for all grant funding and regional priority-setting. The plan is not only a guide for annual decision-making but also a framework for long-term system improvement.

- How the CJAC Uses the Plan
- Prioritize grant funding: During the grant scoring process, the CJAC reviews each application against the identified priority needs in the plan. For example, if jail overcrowding and reentry services are noted as top gaps, proposals addressing those issues receive higher consideration.
- Align project selection with strategic needs: The CJAC ensures that project proposals directly connect to the gaps and priorities documented in the plan. This prevents

funding of one-off or low-impact projects and encourages consistency across jurisdictions.

- Promote transparency and data-informed decisions: Meeting agendas, scoring rubrics, and funding recommendations are tied back to the strategic plan, allowing applicants and stakeholders to understand why specific projects are recommended for funding.
- Guide future evaluations and updates: The CJAC revisits the plan at least once every two years to incorporate new data, evaluate progress on funded projects, and ensure priorities remain relevant to the region.

Implementation in Practice

At each grant cycle, CJAC members receive a briefing on the strategic plan's identified needs. Proposals are first screened for eligibility and then evaluated on how well they address these needs. Scoring sheets include a section requiring members to document the alignment of the proposal with the plan. Final funding recommendations are made in open meetings, ensuring that the use of the plan is transparent and consistent.

Future Use and Updates

The strategic plan is treated as a "living document." The CJAC uses it not only for grant prioritization but also for broader system planning, such as encouraging collaboration among law enforcement, courts, victim services, and behavioral health providers. Updates are made biennially in coordination with community stakeholders and may also occur in response to significant events, such as a major disaster, shifts in state/federal policy, or notable changes in crime and behavioral health trends.

Appendices (Sample)

Appendix A – Community Engagement Documentation

Community Engagement Meeting – February 12, 2025

Agenda:

- Welcome and Introductions
- Review of Regional Crime Data
- Discussion: Juvenile Justice Trends
- Victim Services Needs Assessment
- Public Comment Period
- Next Steps and Closing

Sign-in Sheet (Summary):

- 15 participants including law enforcement, victim service providers, probation officers, and community members
- Notable participants: Smith County Sheriff's Office, Pine Valley Juvenile Probation, Safe Haven Women's Shelter

Appendix B – Public Input Results

Regional Survey conducted March 2025 (n=220 responses):

- 72% of respondents reported substance abuse as the top community concern
- 64% identified a need for expanded mental health services
- 45% expressed concern about repeat offenders and reentry challenges
- 32% emphasized lack of victim housing and shelter availability

Appendix C – Data Tables and Charts

Table 1. Violent Crime Trends in Pine Valley Region (2019–2023):

2019 – 420 cases
2020 – 460 cases
2021 – 480 cases
2022 – 520 cases
2023 – 470 cases

Chart Reference: See attached graph of mental health prevalence compared to state averages.

Appendix D – Stakeholder Rosters and CJAC Information

CJAC Membership Roster (2025):

- John Martinez – Chair, County Commissioner
- Sarah Nguyen – Victim Services Advocate
- Chief David Lopez – Pine Valley Police Department
- Maria Gomez – Behavioral Health Provider
- Rachel Thompson – Juvenile Probation Officer

CJAC Bylaws (Summary):

- CJAC will meet at least twice annually to review criminal justice priorities and funding recommendations.
- Quorum requires majority of members present.
- All funding recommendations must align with the adopted Criminal Justice Strategic Plan.

Appendix E – Supporting Documents

Excerpt: Pine Valley Community Needs Assessment, 2024

Key Findings: Limited access to rural mental health care, long wait times for substance abuse treatment, and lack of trauma-informed victim services in surrounding counties.

Appendix F – Plan Update Log

The table below records revisions, updates, and CJAC approvals to ensure the plan remains a living document.

Date	Update Description	Approved By (CJAC/COG)
March 2025	Initial stakeholder input incorporated into draft priorities.	CJAC
May 2025	Data tables updated with 2023 Uniform Crime Report statistics.	CJAC
August 2025	Final draft reviewed and approved.	CJAC & COG Board