

BILL ANALYSIS

C.S.S.B. 578
By: Hinojosa
Corrections
Committee Report (Substituted)

BACKGROUND AND PURPOSE

Interested parties contend that there is a wide disparity between the number of Texas Department of Criminal Justice (TDCJ) reentry coordinators and the number of individuals who leave TDCJ each year. This disparity, they assert, makes it nearly impossible for the coordinators to provide meaningful information, counseling, or resources to those individuals, many of whom desperately need housing and employment assistance. The parties note that individuals leaving TDCJ also need contact information for the agencies that will provide them with medical care and mental health care. These parties emphasize that many of these individuals could help themselves if they only had access to relevant, up-to-date, county-specific information about reentry services. C.S.S.B. 578 seeks to make such information more readily accessible.

CRIMINAL JUSTICE IMPACT

It is the committee's opinion that this bill does not expressly create a criminal offense, increase the punishment for an existing criminal offense or category of offenses, or change the eligibility of a person for community supervision, parole, or mandatory supervision.

RULEMAKING AUTHORITY

It is the committee's opinion that this bill does not expressly grant any additional rulemaking authority to a state officer, department, agency, or institution.

ANALYSIS

C.S.S.B. 578 amends the Government Code to require the Texas Department of Criminal Justice (TDCJ) to identify organizations that provide reentry and reintegration resource guides and to collaborate with those organizations to prepare a resource guide that is to be made available to all inmates. The bill requires TDCJ, at a minimum, to collaborate with nonprofit entities that specialize in criminal justice issues, faith-based organizations, and organizations that offer pro bono legal services to inmates or that are composed of the families and friends of inmates. The bill requires TDCJ to make the resource guide available in the Windham School District libraries and in each correctional facility peer educator classroom, chapel, reintegration specialist office, and any area or classroom that TDCJ uses for the purpose of providing information about reentry to inmates. The bill requires TDCJ to make available a sufficient number of copies of the resource guide to ensure that each inmate is able to access a guide in a timely manner.

C.S.S.B. 578 requires TDCJ to identify organizations with which to collaborate that provide county-specific information and to collaborate with those organizations to compile county-specific information packets for inmates. The bill requires TDCJ, within the 180-day period preceding the date an inmate will discharge the inmate's sentence or is released on parole, mandatory supervision, or conditional pardon, to provide the inmate with a county-specific information packet for the county that the inmate designates as the inmate's intended residence. The bill requires a county-specific information packet to include for the applicable county, at the minimum, information necessary for the inmate to apply for governmental assistance or benefits

and contact information of workforce offices, housing options, places of worship, support groups, peer-to-peer counseling groups, relevant agencies or organizations as determined by TDCJ and the collaborating organization, agencies and organizations that offer emergency assistance, and agencies and organizations that offer mental health counseling.

EFFECTIVE DATE

September 1, 2015.

COMPARISON OF SENATE ENGROSSED AND SUBSTITUTE

While C.S.S.B. 578 may differ from the original in minor or nonsubstantive ways, the following comparison is organized and formatted in a manner that indicates the substantial differences between the engrossed and committee substitute versions of the bill.

SENATE ENGROSSED

SECTION 1. Subchapter C, Chapter 501, Government Code, is amended by adding Section 501.0971 to read as follows:

Sec. 501.0971. PROVISION OF REENTRY AND REINTEGRATION INFORMATION TO INMATES. (a) The department shall identify organizations that provide reentry and reintegration resource guides and shall collaborate with those organizations to make the resource guides available to all inmates. At a minimum, the department shall collaborate with:

- (1) nonprofit entities that specialize in criminal justice issues;
- (2) faith-based organizations; and
- (3) organizations that:

(A) offer pro bono legal services to inmates; or

(B) are composed of the families and friends of inmates.

(b) The department shall make the resource guides available in the Windham School District libraries and in each of the following areas of a correctional facility:

(1) law libraries;

(2) peer educator classrooms;

(3) chapels;

(4) reintegration specialist offices; and

(5) any area or classroom that is used by the department for the purpose of providing information about reentry to inmates.

(c) The department shall make available a sufficient number of copies of the resource guides to ensure that each inmate is able to access a resource guide in a timely manner.

(d) The department shall identify

HOUSE COMMITTEE SUBSTITUTE

SECTION 1. Subchapter C, Chapter 501, Government Code, is amended by adding Section 501.0971 to read as follows:

Sec. 501.0971. PROVISION OF REENTRY AND REINTEGRATION INFORMATION TO INMATES. (a) The department shall identify organizations that provide reentry and reintegration resource guides and shall collaborate with those organizations to prepare a resource guide that is to be made available to all inmates. At a minimum, the department shall collaborate with:

(1) nonprofit entities that specialize in criminal justice issues;

(2) faith-based organizations; and

(3) organizations that:

(A) offer pro bono legal services to inmates; or

(B) are composed of the families and friends of inmates.

(b) The department shall make the resource guide available in the Windham School District libraries and in each of the following areas of a correctional facility:

(1) peer educator classrooms;

(2) chapels;

(3) reintegration specialist offices; and

(4) any area or classroom that is used by the department for the purpose of providing information about reentry to inmates.

(c) The department shall make available a sufficient number of copies of the resource guide to ensure that each inmate is able to access the resource guide in a timely manner.

(d) The department shall identify

organizations described by Subsection (a) that provide information described by Subsection (e) and shall collaborate with those organizations to compile county-specific information packets for inmates. The department shall:

(1) within the 180-day period preceding the date an inmate is released on parole, mandatory supervision, or conditional pardon, provide the inmate with a county-specific information packet for the county that the inmate designates as the inmate's intended residence; and

(2) within the 180-day period preceding the date an inmate will discharge the inmate's sentence, provide the inmate with a county-specific information packet for Bexar, Dallas, El Paso, Harris, Nueces, Tarrant, and Travis Counties and any other county that the inmate may designate as the inmate's intended residence.

(e) At the minimum, a county-specific packet described by Subsection (d) must include, for the applicable county:

(1) contact information, including telephone numbers, e-mail addresses, physical locations, and mailing addresses, as applicable, of:

(A) workforce offices, housing options, places of worship, support groups, peer-to-peer counseling groups, and other relevant organizations or agencies as determined by the department and the collaborating organization;

(B) agencies and organizations that offer emergency assistance, such as food and clothing banks, temporary bus passes, low-cost medical assistance, and overnight and temporary housing; and

(C) agencies and organizations that offer mental health counseling; and

(2) information necessary for the inmate to apply for governmental assistance or benefits, including Medicaid, social security benefits, or nutritional assistance programs under Chapter 33, Human Resources Code.

SECTION 2. This Act takes effect September 1, 2015.

organizations described by Subsection (a) that provide information described by Subsection (e) and shall collaborate with those organizations to compile county-specific information packets for inmates. The department shall, within the 180-day period preceding the date an inmate will discharge the inmate's sentence or is released on parole, mandatory supervision, or conditional pardon, provide the inmate with a county-specific information packet for the county that the inmate designates as the inmate's intended residence.

(e) At the minimum, a county-specific packet described by Subsection (d) must include, for the applicable county:

(1) contact information, including telephone numbers, e-mail addresses, physical locations, and mailing addresses, as applicable, of:

(A) workforce offices, housing options, places of worship, support groups, peer-to-peer counseling groups, and other relevant organizations or agencies as determined by the department and the collaborating organization;

(B) agencies and organizations that offer emergency assistance, such as food and clothing banks, temporary bus passes, low-cost medical assistance, and overnight and temporary housing; and

(C) agencies and organizations that offer mental health counseling; and

(2) information necessary for the inmate to apply for governmental assistance or benefits, including Medicaid, social security benefits, or nutritional assistance programs under Chapter 33, Human Resources Code.

SECTION 2. Same as engrossed version.