

SUBJECT: Job training and information for ex- prison, state jail inmates

COMMITTEE: Corrections — committee substitute recommended

VOTE: 5 ayes — Hightower, Gray, Culberson, Farrar, Pitts

0 nays

4 absent — Allen, Longoria, Serna, Telford

WITNESSES: None

BACKGROUND: Project RIO, for the reintegration of offenders, is an employment referral program for persons released from prison to parole. The program is administered by the Texas Employment Commission under memorandums of understanding with the Texas Department of Criminal Justice.

The Texas Council on Workforce and Economic Competitiveness was created by the Legislature in 1993 to promote the development of an educated, skilled workforce, to make recommendations concerning workforce development programs and to develop recommendations for consolidation of work force development programs. Chief elected officials in local areas are allowed to create local workforce development boards to develop local plans for workforce training and service and to create "one-stop shops" to serve employers, workers and students.

The Smart Jobs Fund Program was created by the Legislature in 1993 as an employment training program in which grants are given to businesses to improve the skills of workers.

DIGEST: CSHB 1180 would expand the duties of local workforce development boards to include, in cooperation with project RIO, job training and employment assistance for persons formerly sentenced to prisons and state jails. The Texas Department of Criminal Justice (TDCJ) and the Council on Workforce and Economic Competitiveness would be required to adopt a memorandum of understanding establishing their responsibilities to provide job training and employment help through local workforce development

boards for these ex-inmates and to provide information to employers and potential employers.

Project RIO would be required to provide to persons formerly sentenced to prisons and state jails information from certain state agencies, including information from: local workforce development boards on job training and employment referrals; the Texas Commission on Alcohol and Drug Abuse on substance abuse treatment services; the Texas Department of Housing and Community Affairs on housing services; the Texas Veterans Commission on veterans services; and the Texas Department of Human Services on the tax refund given to some employers of Aid to Families with Dependent Children (AFDC) recipients.

Project RIO would have to provide employers and potential employers information from the Texas Department of Commerce on the enterprise zone and smart jobs fund program and information from local workforce development boards on job training and education programs.

The Texas Employment Commission (TEC) would be required to adopt memorandums of understanding with the agencies to establish each agencies' responsibilities. TEC would have to prepare an annual report describing the number of ex-offenders who have received services under the agreements.

Persons released from prisons and state jails would be added to the list of those given priority in the smart jobs fund program (currently, state residents).

The current authorization for local probation departments to work with public school districts, colleges and universities to establish developmental programs for probationers would be replaced with authorization to work the Texas Employment Commission, the Council on Workforce and Economic Competitiveness and local workforce development boards.

The Department of Commerce would be required to provide information about financial assistance for skills assessment and job training for probationers to local probation departments, TEC, the Council on Workforce and Economic Competitiveness and local workforce

development boards rather than to public schools districts, colleges, and universities.

The bill would take immediate effect is approved by two thirds of the membership of each house.

**SUPPORTERS
SAY:**

CSHB 1180 would ensure that ex- prison and state jail inmates are included in job training programs and that state agency efforts are focused and coordinated to help them find jobs. If ex-inmates and prisoners are employed, they are far less likely to return to the criminal justice system, and the state should do all it can to help them get jobs and job training.

CSHB 1180 would make sure that workforce development centers and boards and the smart jobs program are involved in finding jobs and training for ex-offenders. Currently Project RIO has some working agreements with these groups, and CSHB 1180 would provide a basis for strengthening and formalizing those agreements.

CSHB 1180 ensures that Project RIO would provide ex-offenders with information about state agency programs that they could use to help them get a job, find substance abuse treatment, find housing and receive veterans benefits. Some of this information is being disseminated now but it would be better to have the interaction between Project RIO and state agencies formalized and to have memorandums of understanding that clearly outline each agencies responsibilities. Requiring Project RIO to provide employers with information about programs that help workers and that offer incentives to businesses to hire certain workers could help ex-offenders and others find jobs.

CSHB 1180 would shift the emphasis from education to employment in local probation department's authority to establish developmental programs and in which entities the commerce department provides with information on job training programs. The priority for helping ex-offenders should be on jobs with education designed to help in job acquisition. CSHB 1180 does not mandate any job programs or eliminate any education programs; it simply shifts the focus of some programs and information to jobs and job training. Judges would still be required to order probationers who do not demonstrate at least a sixth grade educational skill level to obtain those

skills, and probation departments would still work with probationers to meet that requirement.

OPPONENTS
SAY:

There is no need to specify that the smart jobs program shall give priority to residents, *including* residents formerly sentenced to prison or state jail. This population is currently eligible for the smart jobs program and naming it could have the unintended effect of complicating the simply-designed program. Currently, decisions about training and hiring are made by employers or others who receive grants to do the training. Specifically naming one group of residents could raise expectations that this group is entitled to special services, that the state is encouraging these employees over others or that the state is monitoring private businesses' training and hiring decisions.

NOTES:

The committee substitute replaced the phrase "persons formerly *confined* in the institutional division or the state jail division" in the original bill with "persons *formerly sentenced* to the institutional division or the state jail division."