

SUBJECT: Texas Youth Commission character education and training pilot program

COMMITTEE: Corrections — committee substitute recommended

VOTE: 4 ayes — Madden, McReynolds, Haggerty, Jones

0 nays

3 absent — Hochberg, Dunnam, Oliveira

WITNESSES: For — Doots Dufour, Texas Catholic Correctional Ministries - Diocese of Austin; (*Registered, but did not testify*: Jodie Smith, Texans Care for Children)

Against — None

On — Marc Levin, Texas Public Policy Foundation

BACKGROUND: The Character Training Institute, a non-profit 501 (c) 3 corporation, is an educational organization that focuses on character. The Character First! curriculum is designed to teach 49 character qualities in a non-sectarian manner. Translated into 11 languages, this language-based program defines words and encourages participants to develop positive habits in daily life.

DIGEST: CSHB 1814 would require the Texas Youth Commission (TYC) to establish a character education and training pilot program. The program would be modeled after the Character First! program or a similar program emphasizing character education and training.

The program would be established at either Unit I or Unit II of the McLennan County State Juvenile Correctional Facility and another correctional facility operated and selected by TYC. The deadline for program establishment would be January 1, 2008.

The commission would have to conduct a study to determine cost savings resulting from the implementation of such a program. The study would compare cost savings at facilities with and without the program and would address recidivism rates, staff turnover rates, and overall facility damage.

A report outlining results of this study would be delivered to the Legislature by January 1, 2011 and January 1, 2013. The commission would deliver the final results of the study to the Legislature by January 1, 2015.

The bill would take effect on September 1, 2007. The proposed legislation would expire on February 1, 2016.

**SUPPORTERS  
SAY:**

Many incarcerated youth lack role models to demonstrate positive behavior emphasized in programs like Character First! By establishing a character development program, the bill would help TYC's youth make better decisions in their daily lives.

The Character First! program would include all staff members at the selected facilities, not just incarcerated youth. This approach would allow for the holistic implementation of program objectives, and the inclusion of staff members would help meet the public demand for juvenile justice reform.

The study of this pilot program would help policymakers determine whether a character education and training program should be implemented on a larger scale. The study would provide important information on the cost savings from a character education and training program with respect to recidivism, staff turnover, and facility damage.

**OPPONENTS  
SAY:**

Before this program was implemented, solid evidence of its impact on the target population would be needed. Character First! often is used in elementary schools. The TYC population represents a very different group for whom such a program may not prove as effective.

**NOTES:**

The bill would result in a cost of \$131,710 in fiscal 2008 and \$48,102 in fiscal 2009, according to the Legislative Budget Board.