

SUBJECT: Career ladder for certain prison industry workers

COMMITTEE: Corrections — favorable, without amendment

VOTE: 5 ayes — Madden, Hochberg, McReynolds, Haggerty, Jones
0 nays
2 absent — Dunnam, Oliveira

WITNESSES: For — Murry Bridges; William Kennedy; Nicole Porter, ACLU of Texas; Rick Rasbeary; Toby Tobias, American Federation of State, County, and Municipal Employees
Against — None

BACKGROUND: In 2001, the Legislature created a career advancement ladder for correctional officers in the Texas Department of Criminal Justice (TDCJ). Those officers who work in an industrial oversight capacity were not included on this correctional officer advancement ladder.

DIGEST: HB 315 would amend Government Code, sec. 493.007(a) to require that the career ladder program developed for correctional officers include prison industry workers.

The bill would define “prison industry worker” to mean a department employee, other than a correctional officer, who was assigned to work on a program or project established under ch. 497 and whose job on a regular basis required routine contact with state jail defendants or inmates confined in facilities operated by or under contract with TDCJ. The term would include a farm manager, livestock supervisor, maintenance foreman, shop foreman, medical assistant, food service supervisor, steward, education consultant, commodity specialist, or correctional counselor.

The bill would take effect September 1, 2007, and would apply to any person employed by TDCJ as a prison industry worker or who became eligible for promotion by the department as a prison industry worker on or after the effective date.

**SUPPORTERS
SAY:**

HB 315 would provide prison industry workers the same opportunities as other correctional officers. These prison industry workers are employed with TDCJ as part of the Texas Correctional Industries (TCI), a program designed to provide job skills to offenders, reduce recidivism, and provide industrial support to TDCJ and the state. TCI has programs that produce license plates and agricultural products, and refurbish computers for public schools, among others. These employees perform the same offender control and supervision functions as other correctional officers while providing industrial management and training to offenders. There are about 400 such employees. Their separate advancement track results in prison industry workers reaching the limits of possible advancement faster than other correctional officers.

The bill would not provide a blanket pay raise for these workers. Instead, it would provide advancement opportunities to prison industry workers who merited them. Prison industry workers undergo the same training and perform the same tasks as other correctional officers and provide training to offenders in programs that reduce recidivism. TDCJ is facing a shortage of correctional officers, and HB 315 would help the state to retain these valuable employees. Any state funds to retain quality prison industry workers would represent an investment in valuable training and industrial programs.

**OPPONENTS
SAY:**

HB 315 would cost the state \$1,805,354 in general revenue funds per fiscal year, according to the fiscal note. The state has more urgent priorities that need to be addressed before providing a select group of prison officers additional advancements and pay raises.