

SUBJECT: Requiring TDCJ comprehensive offender reentry and reintegration plan

COMMITTEE: Corrections — committee substitute recommended

VOTE: 9 ayes — McReynolds, Madden, England, Hodge, Kolkhorst, Marquez, Martinez, S. Miller, Ortiz

0 nays

2 absent — Dutton, Sheffield

WITNESSES: For — Donald Lee, Texas Conference of Urban Counties; Mark Mendez, Tarrant County; Stephen Williams, City of Houston; Ana Yanez-Correa, Texas Criminal Justice Coalition; (*Registered, but did not testify*: David Kobierowski, American Civil Liberties Union of Texas; T.J. Patterson, City of Fort Worth; Stephen Reeves, Christian Life Commission, Baptist General Convention of Texas)

Against — None

On — Bryan Collier, Texas Department of Criminal Justice

DIGEST: CSHB 1711 would require the Texas Department of Criminal Justice (TDCJ) to develop a comprehensive plan to reduce recidivism and ensure the successful reentry and reintegration of offenders into the community after release from a correctional facility. The plan would have to be developed by January 1, 2010.

The bill also would require TDCJ to develop policies related to family unity and participation in offender's transition to the community and to study whether the requirements of CSHB 1711 reduce recidivism rates.

The bill would take immediate effect if finally passed by a two-thirds record vote of the membership of each house. Otherwise, it would take effect September 1, 2009.

**Reentry and reintegration plan.** The reentry and reintegration plan would have to include the following:

- an assessment of offenders to determine which skills they need to be successful upon release;
- programs that address each offenders' needs;
- a comprehensive network of transition programs to address the needs of released offenders;
- identification of providers of local programs and transitional services with whom TDCJ could contract to implement the reentry and reintegration plan; and
- the sharing of information between local coordinators, contractors, and other service providers to assess and address each offender's needs.

An offender's personal health information could be disclosed only if the offender consented and the disclosure did not violate federal law.

Programs that addressed offenders needs and the network of transition programs to address those needs would have to be implemented by highly skilled, experienced staff and would have to provide offenders:

- individualized case management and a full continuum of care;
- life skills training;
- education, including special education if necessary;
- employment training;
- appropriate treatment programs; and
- parenting and relationship building classes.

The program would have to be designed to build support for the offender from the community into which the offender was discharged or released.

TDCJ would be able to contract and coordinate with private vendors, local governments, and other entities to implement the comprehensive reentry and reintegration plan, including contracting to

- coordinate the supervision and services given to offenders in prison with any supervision and services provided to released offenders;
- provide offenders awaiting release with documents, including identification papers, medical prescriptions, job training certificates, and referrals to services; and
- provide housing and structured programs, through which offenders were provided services.

The contracts would have to contain specific performance measures used by TDCJ to evaluate compliance with contract terms.

TDCJ would have to incorporate into the reentry and reintegration plan with current reintegration services and a program that assists long-term inmates in preparing for their release.

**Family unity and participation policies.** TDCJ would be required to adopt and implement policies that encourage family unity while an offender was confined and family participation in an offender's transition to the community. These policies would have to be adopted by January 1, 2010.

When determining housing assignments, the agency would have to consider the best interest of the offender's family and, if possible, house offenders close to the counties in which their families live. TDCJ also would be required to research the impact of offender's confinement on the well-being of offender's children.

**Recidivism study.** TDCJ would be required to research whether the reentry and reintegration plan and the policies concerning family unity and participation required by the bill reduced recidivism rates. The agency would have to report the results of the recidivism study to the Legislature by September 1 in even-numbered years.

**SUPPORTERS  
SAY:**

CSHB 1711 is necessary to ensure that the approximately 70,000 prison inmates who are released each year receive the assistance they need to successfully reintegrate into Texas communities. Successful reintegration is vital to reducing the recidivism of offenders, which helps safeguard the public and rebuilds families and communities, and in the long run, saves Texas money. Studies show that the time immediately following release is the most critical stage of reentry and the time offenders are most susceptible to recidivism. CSHB 1711 would help ensure that offenders have the tools to meet their needs during that time.

Currently, released offenders often are faced with a lack of services and programs to assist their reintegration and with a lack of knowledge of programs and services in the community. They often lack the skills and tools to get the jobs necessary to support themselves and their families. Some need substance abuse or mental health treatment, while others need

help with practical things like getting identification documents or prescriptions filled.

While TDCJ assesses inmates upon their entry into the state's prisons, the assessments focus on determining the current medical, educational, or other situation of the offender but do not look long-range at what the offender may need when released. While in prison offenders may receive education services, substance abuse treatment, life skills or job skills training, these services are not necessarily offered with an eye to community reentry. When offenders are released, some may have parole conditions imposed on them, while others may have some information about re-entry services. However, none receive the type of comprehensive, individualized plan that would be required by CSHB 1711. Parole officers who have ongoing contact with some releasees function as monitors and enforcers of parole conditions, not as reentry coordinators.

CSHB 1711 would address these problems by requiring TDCJ to develop a comprehensive plan to reduce recidivism and ensure the successful reentry and reintegration of released offenders. The specific, clear mandate in the bill would focus state resources, including existing programs and services within prisons, on this important task. The bill would ensure the reentry plans were tailored to offenders' needs and that they identified needed services and programs both in prison and the free world. This holistic approach would help put offenders in the best position to not reoffend.

The bill specifically would require TDCJ to focus on family unity and participation, including through housing assignments and family contact through visitation, mail, and telephone policies. Maintaining on-going contact with their families would help offenders be successful at reintegration.

The fiscal note for CSHB 1711 assumes no expansion of existing services or treatment programs. The estimated annual cost of about \$6.4 million would cover the cost of reentry coordinators who would help offenders map out their transition to the community. The House-approved version of SB 1, the general appropriations bill for fiscal 2010-11, includes \$10.3 million for these reentry coordinators. Focusing existing resources on reentry and committing funds for these efforts would save the state money in the long run while increasing public safety and rebuilding the lives of offenders and their families.

OPPONENTS  
SAY:

Meeting all the requirements in CSHB 1711 would lead to an increased demand on state resources. The Legislature should be cautious about committing to new programs during a time of economic uncertainty.

NOTES:

The committee substitute made several changes to the filed version of the bill, including adding the requirement that contracts with other entities include performance measures, adding the requirement that the reentry and reintegration plan include the identification of providers of existing local programs and services, and requiring TDCJ to conduct the recidivism study.

The companion bill, SB 1786 by Whitmire, has been referred to the Senate Criminal Justice Committee