

SUBJECT: Streamlined correctional officer training for military veterans

COMMITTEE: Defense and Veterans' Affairs — favorable, without amendment

VOTE: 6 ayes — Corte, Edwards, Farias, Ortiz, Pickett, C. Turner

0 nays

3 absent — Vaught, Chavez, Maldonado

WITNESSES: None

BACKGROUND: Government Code, ch. 493 establishes the Texas Department of Criminal Justice (TDCJ), including its mission, organization, policies regarding inmates, and personnel policies related to recruitment, evaluation, selection, and training.

DIGEST: HB 3721 would require the Texas Department of Criminal Justice (TDCJ) to establish and implement a streamlined program to train and certify former military service members, current or former members of the military reserves, or current or former members of the Texas National Guard as state correctional officers. TDCJ would model the program after the Troops to Teachers program administered by the U.S. Department of Education and Department of Defense.

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.

SUPPORTERS SAY: HB 3721 would allow TDCJ to address staffing shortfalls in correctional facilities by targeting military veterans for recruitment. It also would help returning veterans find employment by making more information about getting into the corrections field available online. This bill would not dilute any existing training requirements or weaken the applicant screening process in any way, but would give TDCJ discretion to implement any changes to the process they see fit, such as requiring the same number of training hours but compressing the number of calendar days taken to achieve them.

OPPONENTS  
SAY:

While staffing shortfalls in correctional facilities need to be addressed, some concerns remain about the implementation of a targeted recruitment program. When hiring military veterans through programs established by HB 3721, TDCJ should exercise due diligence in screening applicants and conducting background checks. Hiring quality officers who are trustworthy and will do the job well is more important than simply increasing the number of corrections officers.