

SUBJECT: Requiring an annual statistical report on TDCJ inmates who are parents

COMMITTEE: Corrections — favorable, without amendment

VOTE: 6 ayes — White, Allen, Bailes, Dean, Sherman, Stephenson

0 nays

2 absent — Bowers, Neave

WITNESSES: For — Lauren Johnson, ACLU of Texas; Jason Vaughn, Texas Young Republicans; Koretta Brown (*Registered, but did not testify*: Terra Tucker, Alliance for Safety and Justice; Hal Wuertz, Austin Justice Coalition; Traci Berry, Goodwill Central Texas; Will Francis, National Association of Social Workers-Texas Chapter; Mary Mergler, Texas Appleseed; Kathryn Freeman, Texas Baptist Christian Life Commission; Lindsey Linder, Texas Criminal Justice Coalition; Lauren Oertel, Texas Inmate Families Association; Mia Greer; Margarita Luna; Kirsten Ricketts)

Against — None

On — Jason Clark, Texas Department of Criminal Justice

DIGEST: HB 659 would require the Texas Department of Criminal Justice (TDCJ) to maintain and annually update statistical information on the number of inmates in a facility operated by or under contract with TDCJ who were parents of a child of any age.

By December 31 of each year, TDCJ would be required to submit a report to the Texas Education Agency and Department of Family and Protective Services summarizing this statistical information.

The bill would take effect September 1, 2019. The first report would be required to be submitted no later than December 31, 2020.

SUPPORTERS HB 659 would provide the Texas Education Agency and Department of

SAY: Family and Protective Services with information that would be valuable for state agencies and advocacy groups in crafting programs and services for incarcerated parents and their children.

A child with an incarcerated parent is more likely to be at risk of committing crimes later in life, and providing support to children while their parent is incarcerated could have significant long-term crime deterrence effects. To combat this problem, Texas has recently begun investing in programs aimed at youth with incarcerated parents, but there currently is no statewide mechanism for reporting the number of inmates with children.

Under current TDCJ policy, inmates are asked during intake to self-report whether they have children. This information is stored on a TDCJ computer system, meaning it would require little effort or cost for the department to generate an annual report.

**OPPONENTS
SAY:** Although HB 659 would provide valuable information, the current form of the bill could result in statistical information with certain limitations. Because HB 659 requires TDCJ to collect and publish information on parents of a child of any age, the reported information could be broader than is needed for the purpose of identifying at-risk minors. As a result, certain categories of aggregated information could be of only limited use.

The information is self-reported, so the statistics could have certain gaps, as the reports would be limited by the inmate's memory and knowledge of the self-reported facts.