



Budget Rider 58 83rd Legislative Session

Implementation Guide



Improved Ombudsman Reporting Will Increase Public Faith in Oversight Process

As the largest prison system in the country, the Texas Department of Criminal Justice (TDCJ) is faced with the daunting task of effectively and efficiently managing an immense operation. Decades of research and experience have demonstrated that all public institutions, from schools to hospitals, benefit from independent, external oversight.

TDCJ has several internal accountability mechanisms, one of which is the Ombudsman Office. The intent of the Ombudsman Office is to be open to complaints about TDCJ from the public and to respond to those complaints.

However, the Ombudsman Office currently does not provide data about the number and type of inquiries it handles, or about the resolution of these inquiries, which would provide a much-needed measure of oversight and allow officials to better track problems and complaints that reoccur.

What does Budget Rider 58 intend to do?

This budget rider mandates that the Ombudsman Office provides annual reports about the number and type of inquiries it receives, and the resolution of those inquiries, to the Governor, Lieutenant Governor, Speaker of the House, and the legislative committees tasked with criminal justice and appropriations. These reports shall also be made available to the public.

There are two purposes to this report. The first is to ensure that state officials who oversee criminal justice policies have more information as to the nature of complaints made by members of the public to the Ombudsman about TDCJ operations so those officials can gauge how accurately, quickly, and completely TDCJ addresses the complaints. The other purpose is to increase the overall trust and confidence the public and state officials have in the Ombudsman Office and its capability of responding to complaints.

Responsibilities of the TDCJ Ombudsman Office

- ❑ Act as a liaison between TDCJ and the general public
- ❑ Respond to informational inquiries regarding agency policies, procedures, or actions
- ❑ Respond to questions concerning a specific offender
- ❑ Facilitate problem resolution
- ❑ Make appropriate referrals to agency staff
- ❑ Act as a contact and information resource for special interest groups