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2019 FACT SHEET

CSHB 3227

Expand Access to Rehabilitative Programs and Peer Support Services For Incarcerated Women

PROBLEM & BACKGROUND

Women in Texas prisons have access to far fewer educational and vocational programs than their male counterparts. Through the Texas Department of Criminal Justice (TDCJ) and the Windham School District (WSD, which provides educational and vocational services to people in TDCJ), incarcerated women have access to **approximately half** of the degree plans, certifications, and educational vocational programs offered to men.

It is important to note that WSD does provide programming to a greater proportion of women than men. Also important, WSD's Superintendent, Dr. Clint Carpenter, and TDCJ officials have expressed a desire to further expand the number of programs offered to women. This must be a priority: **Given the proportionally high number of women incarcerated in Texas, it is critical to provide them the education and skills necessary to re-enter the workforce and remain on a stable, successful path.** Just a few years ago, a survey of women in Texas prisons revealed that most women were not receiving such assistance; only 19% reported that TDCJ helped them address their employment training needs "very well," while the majority – 52% – responded "not well at all."¹

In addition to educational and vocational programs that can help prepare people for reentry, in-house peer support services can be greatly beneficial to people transitioning back into the community. However, these services are not currently provided to men or women in Texas prisons. In 2015, the Texas Legislature funded a pilot program to evaluate the use and effectiveness of reentry peer support in three Texas jails, where people with complex needs are typically released to the community with little planning, preparation, or effective community programming. Results from the pilot program found:

- Criminal behavior and associated problems declined significantly over time; and
- Declines were observed in arrests, criminal planning, and recent history of criminal acts.²

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This bill would require TDCJ to develop and implement policies that increase and promote incarcerated women's access to programs – including educational, vocational, substance use treatment, rehabilitation, life skills training, peer support, and pre-release programs. TDCJ must also report annually to state leadership on progress being made to expand program access for women. Additionally, this bill will increase the availability of peer support services, including certified peer specialist services, for eligible women and men in TDCJ. Programming aimed at reducing recidivism is an especially cost-effective approach to crime reduction. To the extent the State can develop effective, recidivism-reduction programs aimed at both women and men, it will likely get a significant return on its investment while strengthening Texas families and communities.

Citations on reverse.

Citations

¹ Lindsey Linder, *An Unsupported Population: The Treatment of Women in Texas' Criminal Justice System*, April 2018, 21.

² Hogg Foundation for Mental Health, Evaluation of DSHS Re-Entry Project (Rider 73): Final Evaluation Report, <http://hogg.utexas.edu/wp-content/uploads/2019/02/Re-Entry-Peer-Support-Final-Report-Jan-10-2019.pdf>.