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TESTIMONY 2013

H.B. 2289

Dear Members of the Committee,

Thank you for allowing me this opportunity to present testimony in favor of H.B. 2289, the Sunset legislation for Texas' corrections agencies. The Texas Criminal Justice Coalition (TCJC) especially supports bill provisions that will create more comprehensive and uniform assessments, and improve reentry and reintegration efforts through fully implemented reentry plans, as well as expanded Reentry Task Force membership and duties.

As an organization, TCJC's primary focus is on creating stronger families, less taxpayer waste, and safer communities throughout Texas. This is possible through improved rehabilitation and reentry efforts, access to treatment resources and other assistance, improved efficiency throughout the system, and fiscal responsibility.

2011-2013 SUNSET REVIEW

In late 2011, Texas' corrections agencies began undergoing a Sunset review; these agencies include the Texas Department of Criminal Justice, the Texas Board of Pardons and Paroles, and the Windham School District. The Sunset review process offered TCJC the opportunity to provide a multitude of recommendations for improvements to the state's criminal justice system. We thank the Sunset Advisory Committee and its staff for its commitment to the evaluation of these important agencies, and for working diligently to compile reports and analyses that informed the legislation being heard before this Committee today.

Texas' criminal justice and corrections agencies continue to face challenges, and we are appreciative of the opportunity to present this Committee with information on the provisions of H.B. 2289 that will help to address the burden of strained budgets while preserving public safety and meeting the needs of individuals directly impacted by the system. **Given the state's massive expenditures on incarceration, probation, and parole (totaling over \$3 billion annually), it is critical that this Committee fully consider viable strategies that will protect taxpayer investments, reduce recidivism, and strengthen communities.**

KEY PROVISIONS OF H.B. 2289

TCJC is strongly supportive of bill provisions that will create more comprehensive and uniform assessments, and improve reentry and reintegration efforts.

Assessments

- **Creation of a Standardized Risk and Needs Assessment Instrument.** Under this bill, the Texas Department of Criminal Justice (the Department) must adopt a standardized instrument to assess the risks and needs of each individual in the adult criminal justice system, based on criminogenic factors, to be fully implemented by 2015. [SECTION 4, Sec. 501.0921(a); (d)]
- **Use of an Assessment in Prisons and State Jails.** Each facility under the oversight of the Department's Correctional Institutions Division must establish a case management committee to assess each inmate in the facility and ensure the inmate is receiving appropriate services or participating in appropriate programs. [SECTION 2, Sec. 493.031(a)]

Continued on reverse.

Assessments (Continued)

- **Regarding: Use of an Assessment in Prisons and State Jails.** The Department must also include the results of any assessment in an inmate's individual treatment plan, including any assessment made using the risk and needs assessment instrument and any vocational, educational, or substance abuse assessment. [SECTION 19, Sec. 508.152(b-1)]
- **Use of an Assessment in Probation.** The Department's Community Justice Assistance Division, which oversees probation ("community supervision"), must require each probation department to use the risk and needs assessment instrument to assess each defendant at the time of his or her initial placement on probation. [SECTION 21, Sec. 509.0041]
- **Use of an Assessment in Reentry Planning.** The Department's comprehensive reentry and reintegration plan (see below) must incorporate the use of the risk and needs assessment instrument. [SECTION 3, Sec. 501.092(b)(1)]

Comprehensive Reentry and Reintegration Plan

- **Implementation of a Reentry Plan.** The Department must develop *and* adopt a comprehensive plan to reduce recidivism and ensure the successful reentry and reintegration of individuals into the community following their release or discharge from a correctional facility. [SECTION 3, Sec. 501.092(a)]

This plan must provide for programs to address assessed needs; provide for a comprehensive network of transition programs; identify Department-offered transition services and eligible participants; coordinate the provision of reentry and reintegration services for effective and efficient service provision; provide for data collection on inmates eligible for services and those who actually received them; provide for outcome measurements to evaluate the efficacy of services provided; identify providers of existing reentry and reintegration services that can assist the Department; and provide for information sharing among all service providers. [SECTION 3, Sec. 501.092(b)(2)-(9)]

- **Ongoing Evaluation of and Updates to the Reentry Plan.** Each even-numbered year, the Department must submit a report evaluating the plan via the results of the plan's outcome measurements. Furthermore, the Department must update the plan at least once every three years. [SECTION 3, Sec. 501.092(d); (i)]

Expansion of State's Reentry Task Force

- **Expanded Task Force Membership.** The State's Reentry Task Force, established in 2009, must increase to include representatives from the Board of Pardons and Paroles, the Windham School District, the Texas Commission on Jail Standards, the Department of State Health Services, the Texas Court of Criminal Appeals, the County Judges and Commissioner's Association of Texas, the Sheriff's Association of Texas, the Texas District and County Attorneys Association, the Texas Conference of Urban Counties, a probation department, an organization that advocates on behalf of system-involved individuals, and a local reentry planning entity. [SECTION 5, Sec. 501.098(a)-(b)]

Expansion of State's Reentry Task Force (Continued)

- **Expanded Task Force Duties.** The Task Force must (rather than may) identify gaps in services for returning individuals relating to employment, housing, substance abuse treatment, medical care, and other areas, and coordinate with existing local program providers to recommend the provision of comprehensive services to such individuals. The Task Force must also identify its goals and deliverables, specify member responsibilities, and create a timeline for achieving its goals. *[SECTION 5, Sec. 501.098(e)-(f)]*

COST-SAVING AND PUBLIC SAFETY-DRIVEN SOLUTION: SUPPORT H.B. 2289 BY REPRESENTATIVE PRICE

H.B. 2289 will increase efficiency and cost savings throughout Texas' criminal justice system through various measures that will ensure individuals are assessed, placed in appropriate treatment programs, and assisted during the critical reentry transition. Through this tailored, rehabilitative approach – in conjunction with strategies that will improve transparency and information sharing – Texas will slow the likelihood of costly re-offending, thus ensuring corrections resources are allocated effectively and protecting taxpayer investments.

CONCLUSION

Thank you again for allowing me the opportunity to testify in favor of this bill, which provides for much-needed strategies that will equip individuals with the tools and information they need to live successful, self-sufficient, law-abiding lives in the community. The Sunset process is a unique opportunity to make improvements to state agencies, and we appreciate this Committee's consideration of measures that will help Texas' corrections agencies fulfill their mission by effectively targeting the root causes of criminal behavior and creating safer communities. The Texas Criminal Justice Coalition urges you to support H.B. 2289.