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TESTIMONY 2013
H.B. 2719

Dear Members of the Committee,

Thank you for allowing me this opportunity to present testimony in favor of H.B. 2719, an effective policy that will identify current gaps in support for youth in Texas' foster care system by collecting data to understand how many foster youth later become involved in the criminal justice system.

A FIRST STEP TO ENSURE FOSTER YOUTH HAVE THE TOOLS THEY NEED TO SUCCEED

Many children in the Texas foster care system have experienced significant trauma – including violence, neglect, abuse, threats, humiliation, and deprivation. Although research provides a growing understanding of the possible connections between childhood trauma and later criminal system involvement, the full scale of the problem is impossible to determine because the Texas Department of Criminal Justice (TDCJ) does not currently inquire about past foster care system involvement during its inmate intake process.

In order to address the complex challenges facing youth in the foster care system, Texas must develop sufficient resources and programs to provide foster youth with the skills they will need to succeed. Collecting information regarding past foster care involvement at inmate intake will provide valuable insight into the current gaps in support for foster care youth in Texas.

KEY FINDINGS

- **TDCJ does not currently inquire into past foster care involvement during inmate intake.**¹ Texas needs this information to learn more about gaps in resources and programs for foster youth that will help them develop the skills they need to succeed. Adding a question about past foster care involvement to TDCJ's existing intake process will not create additional costs.
- **Foster youth are at higher risk for juvenile justice and criminal justice system involvement.**² Texas cannot address the complex challenges facing foster youth without data on potential future criminal system involvement. Collecting additional information during the inmate intake process will allow Texas to fill gaps in resources for at-risk foster youth.

COST-SAVING AND PUBLIC SAFETY-DRIVEN SOLUTION: SUPPORT H.B. 2719 BY REPRESENTATIVE GUILLEN

H.B. 2719 instructs TDCJ to include an additional question in its inmate intake process to determine which incoming inmates have been in the foster care system in Texas. County jails will similarly collect this information. The data collected will be publicly available.

CONCLUSION

Thank you again for allowing me the opportunity to testify in support of H.B. 2719. It is an effective bill that will take the first step to ensure all youth in Texas' foster care system have the support they need to thrive, and the Texas Criminal Justice Coalition strongly urges you to support it.

References on reverse

References

¹ Texas Department of Criminal Justice Classification and Records Division, phone conversation on January 22, 2013.

² See, e.g., H. Huang et al., "The journey of dually-involved youth: The description and prediction of rereporting and recidivism," 2012.