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TESTIMONY 2013
H.B 2399

Dear Members of the Committee,

Thank you for allowing me this opportunity to present testimony in favor of H.B. 2399, an effective policy that aims to sustain positive reform in Texas' juvenile justice system through a system-wide evaluation that will allow leadership to evaluate progress, recommend improvements, effectively allocate resources, and increase agency transparency and accountability.

TEXAS MUST TAKE STEPS TO PROTECT AND SUSTAIN POSITIVE JUVENILE JUSTICE REFORM

Since 2007, Texas legislators have made significant strides in reforming the state's juvenile justice system. Various improvements, such as independent oversight of state secure facilities, the safe deincarceration of low-level youthful offenders, and a prioritization on community-based treatment, have contributed to Texas becoming a national model of juvenile reform. However, since its creation slightly over a year ago, the Texas Juvenile Justice Department (TJJD) has come under the direction of three different leaders and has experienced significant administrative staff turnover. This, in conjunction with various isolated incidents of mistreatment of incarcerated youth, has shown that **further measures must be taken to sustain positive reform.**

To ensure that TJJD continues down the path towards becoming a successful, efficient front-end agency, it must delineate how it will achieve the purpose and goals set forth in S.B. 653 [82(R)], the agency's enabling legislation. **A comprehensive study conducted by TJJD employees on system-wide facility infrastructure, treatment and rehabilitative strategies, oversight, outcome measures, and funding priorities** will allow state leadership to evaluate current system progress, make recommendations for further improvements, effectively allocate resources, and increase transparency and accountability.

KEY FINDINGS

- Since the passage of S.B. 653 [82(R)], TJJD has been working diligently to meet its legislative goals and mandates. However, some goals, like the use of system-wide performance measures and the promotion of service designs and interventions proven to be most effective, have not yet been met. **With a timely evaluation of the system, leadership will have clarity on system strengths and weaknesses, which can inform recommendations and resource allocation.**
- The number of youth committed to state-secure facilities has significantly decreased, falling from 2,738 in FY 2006 to 860 in FY 2012.¹ This decrease has resulted in the majority of youth referred to the system being served at the front-end through community-based supervision, programming, and services. **Further analysis will help leadership determine the success of this approach and how practitioners can continue to effectively meet youths' needs.**

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COST-SAVING AND PUBLIC SAFETY-DRIVEN SOLUTION: SUPPORT H.B. 2399 BY REPRESENTATIVE TURNER

H.B. 2399 aims to create a “roadmap” for TJJJ that will aid in sustaining positive reforms. By requiring the agency to delineate how it will meet the remainder of the goals set forth in S.B.653 [82(R)], lawmakers can ensure that all changes made within the system facilitate successful youth rehabilitation, the effective use of resources, and agency transparency and accountability.

CONCLUSION

Again, I would like to thank you for providing me the opportunity to testify in favor of H.B. 2399, an effective policy that will help Texas stay the course in its efforts to improve its juvenile justice system. The Texas Criminal Justice Coalition strongly urges you to support it, for increased public safety, cost savings, and the identification of effective approaches to address our youths’ needs.

Citation

¹ Texas Juvenile Justice Department, *Commitment Profile for New Commitments Fiscal Years 2006 – 2012*, <http://www.tjjd.texas.gov/research/profile.aspx>.