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TESTIMONY 2013

H.B. 2811

Dear Members of the Committee,

Thank you for allowing me this opportunity to present testimony in favor of H.B. 2811, which further strengthens efforts by the Texas Department of Criminal Justice (TDCJ) to encourage volunteers to collaborate with prison units across Texas, thus enhancing public safety by leveraging existing resources.

#### IDENTIFICATION, RECRUITMENT, AND REPORTING OF VOLUNTEER INVOLVEMENT IN PRISON UNITS IMPROVES OUTCOMES

Throughout the years, volunteers have played a key role in helping TDCJ fulfill its mission by providing supplemental and support services, while helping currently confined individuals engage in learning opportunities that will increase pro-social behaviors and actions. Faith-based volunteers have been particularly critical in volunteer programming, which not only brings hope to the men and women currently incarcerated, but also assists during the critical reentry transition.

TDCJ should adopt and fully implement a policy that will require each warden to identify and recruit local volunteers who can provide programming to incarcerated individuals, such as literacy and educational programs, life and job skills training, drug and alcohol rehabilitation programs, mental health and wellness training, parenting skills training, arts and crafts programs, faith-based programming, and other programs that will further assist TDCJ in its efforts to improve outcomes. Additionally, each warden should write a brief annual report detailing his or her efforts to identify, encourage, and provide volunteer programming; this will help other wardens strengthen their volunteer recruitment practices, and help policy-makers identify which regions need more community engagement in the rehabilitative and reentry processes.

#### KEY FACTS

- More than 75,000 individuals leave state-level incarceration each year in Texas.<sup>1</sup> The more programming that is offered to confined individuals, the more likely they are to succeed upon release.
- TDCJ already allows programming by volunteer organizations like AA/NA sponsors and faith-based groups. Requiring each warden to create a brief report showcasing strategies used to identify and reach out to volunteer groups will allow wardens to share information about successful approaches to recruiting a broader range of volunteers.

#### COST-SAVING AND PUBLIC SAFETY-DRIVEN SOLUTION: SUPPORT H.B. 2811 BY REPRESENTATIVE TOTH

- **H.B. 2811 will increase cost savings and reduce recidivism** by involving the participation of more cost-free volunteer organizations in prisons to help inmates build literacy and education skills, life skills, job skills, parent-child relationship-building skills, and other valuable skills prior to release.
- **H.B. 2811 will enable wardens to share information about which volunteer services and programs work best with particular populations** by generating a brief annual report.
- **H.B. 2811 will lead to more positive relationships between prisons and local municipalities and organizations**, which can later assist individuals during the critical reentry transition.

<sup>1</sup> Texas Department of Criminal Justice, *Fiscal Year 2012 Statistical Report*, 2013, p. 3.