



**TEXAS CRIMINAL
JUSTICE COALITION**

WRITTEN TESTIMONY

**SUBMITTED BY JORGE RENAUD, MSSW
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ON

**THE TEXAS DEPARTMENT OF CRIMINAL JUSTICE
LEGISLATIVE APPROPRIATIONS REQUEST, FY 2016 AND 2017**

AND THE

**TEXAS BOARD OF PARDONS AND PAROLES
LEGISLATIVE APPROPRIATIONS REQUEST, FY 2016 AND 2017**

To

**THE GOVERNOR'S OFFICE OF BUDGET, PLANNING AND POLICY
AND THE LEGISLATIVE BUDGET BOARD**

SEPTEMBER 23, 2014

Dear Members of the Committee,

My name is Jorge Renaud. I am a Policy Analyst for the Texas Criminal Justice Coalition. Thank you for allowing me this opportunity to present public comments on the Legislative Appropriations Requests of the Texas Board of Pardons and Paroles and the Texas Department of Criminal Justice for Fiscal Years 2016 and 2017.

The Texas Criminal Justice Coalition has been closely monitoring our state criminal justice system for years, and as an organization we greatly support the success of Texas' probation and parole systems, diversion programs, reentry strategies, and other practices that reduce prison populations while tackling the root causes of crime, increasing public safety, and saving taxpayers money.

TEXAS BOARD OF PARDONS AND PAROLES (BPP)

- ***Baseline Requests***

The BPP plays a critical role in protecting public safety in Texas. It is the only entity that determines which individuals can be released on parole, which conditions of parole or mandatory supervision must be imposed, and which executive clemency recommendations should be made to the Governor. As such, the Texas Criminal Justice Coalition fully supports each of the BPP's baseline requests to cover operations costs, institutional parole officers, hearings, clemency determinations, and other costs.

- ***Exceptional Items Above the Baseline Budget***

The Texas Criminal Justice Coalition supports two BPP exceptional item requests. One is **Board of Pardons and Paroles – Consultant Services (Item Priority 16)**, which requests \$150,000 per year to update and upgrade parole guidelines. These funds will not only provide the BPP with expert assistance in the formulation of updated guidelines, but they will allow the BPP to comply with recommendations from the Sunset Commission to annually review and update these guidelines.

We also support **Institutional Parole Operations (Item Priority 14)**, which will fund 30 additional Institutional Parole Officers who can offer "additional support to current staff to maintain established levels of productivity in meeting requirements of preparing and submitting the BPPs parole summaries in which parole decisions are made and delivered to offenders."

TEXAS DEPARTMENT OF CRIMINAL JUSTICE (TDCJ)

- **Baseline Requests**

The Texas Criminal Justice Coalition supports TDCJ's baseline requests to accomplish the following:

- » **Goal 01: Provide Prison Diversions through Probation & Community-based Programs**, which includes support for basic supervision, diversion programs, community corrections, and treatment alternatives to incarceration.
- » **Goal 02: Special Needs Offenders**, which includes support for special needs programs and services for mentally ill individuals and those eligible for Medically Recommended Intensive Supervision.
- » **Goal 03: Incarcerate Felons**, with special emphasis on support for the following sub-categories:
 - 3.1.2: Correctional Support Operations
 - 3.1.4: Offender Services
 - 3.1.5: Institutional Goods
 - 3.1.6: Institutional Services
 - 3.1.7: Institutional Operations and Maintenance
 - 3.1.8: Managed Health Care – Unit and Psychiatric Care
 - 3.1.9: Managed Health Care – Hospital and Clinical Care
 - 3.1.10: Managed Health Care – Pharmacy
 - 3.1.11: Health Services
 - 3.1.13: Residential Pre-Parole Facilities
 - 3.2.1: Texas Correctional Industries
 - 3.2.2: Academic and Vocational Training
 - 3.2.3: Treatment Services
 - 3.2.4: Substance Abuse Treatment – Substance Abuse Felony Punishment Facilities
 - 3.2.5: Substance Abuse Treatment – In-Prison Treatment and Coordination
- » **Goal 04: Ensure and Maintain Adequate Facilities**, with special emphasis on water/wastewater improvements for all units.
- » **Goal 05: Board of Pardons and Paroles**, which makes all decisions related to parole and release on mandatory supervision.
- » **Goal 06: Operate Parole System**, which includes support for parole release processing, parole supervision, halfway house facilities, and intermediate sanction facilities.

- » **Goal 07: Indirect Administration**, which includes support for central administration, correctional training, the Inspector General, victim services, and information resources.

Exceptional Items Above the Baseline Budget

In the chart below, we have outlined the TDCJ exceptional items that deserve full support. The numbers before each item in the first column correspond to their *Item Priority ranking* in the agency’s Legislative Appropriations Request, but we have listed them in order of importance to our organization, the Texas Criminal Justice Coalition.

Item	Requested Amount		Texas Criminal Justice Coalition Position
	FY16	FY17	
(5) Probation – Substance Abuse Counseling and Basic Supervision	\$14.1 million	\$14.1 million	Proven community-based programs and treatment provide viable, cost-effective alternatives to incarceration. Already, nearly 402,000 individuals are on community supervision in Texas. Additional resources for CJAD will support local efforts to maintain appropriate caseload sizes, retain specialized officers, and provide effective programs and services, all of which keeps probationers law abiding and self-sufficient members of our Texas communities.
(4) CSCD Health Insurance – Employer Portion	\$3.0 million	\$8.3 million	Employee insurance premiums represent a steadily growing piece of CSCD budgets. Additional resources for health insurance will prevent CSCDs from having to increase caseload sizes, divert funding from needed programming and services for probationers, or reduce staffing levels.
(7) Reentry Initiatives / Transitional Coordinators	\$2.0 million	\$2.0 million	Without a reentry infrastructure, individuals coming out of prison are more likely to re-offend, creating more victims and greater expense for the state. Fifty additional Reentry Transitional Coordinators – intended to help individuals post-release, including those in halfway housing and on parole, and those with mental health needs – will boost public safety and save taxpayer dollars through lowered recidivism. It is crucial, however, that TDCJ begin to target high-risk individuals in medium and close custody and seek ways to offer them meaningful programs based on cognitive behavioral therapies in order to lower recidivism rates.
(3) Correctional Officer / Parole Officer Pay Raise	\$117.5 million	\$117.5 million	Salary increases for Correctional Officers will aid in recruitment and retention of critical agency positions that maintain the safety and security of units. Similarly, salary increases for Parole Officers, who provide crucial supervision and services to parolees, will

			ensure that they remain highly motivated.
(8) TCOOMMI – Expansion of Mental Health / Criminal Justice Initiatives	\$3.0 million	\$3.0 million	<p>Again, an effective reentry infrastructure is critical to the success of individuals exiting prisons – especially those with mental health needs who are more likely to re-offend without a community-based continuum of care.</p> <p>Additional resources for TCOOMMI and local mental health authorities to expand specialized caseloads will assist TDCJ in providing much-needed follow-up treatment for individuals returning to our communities, thus better enabling these individuals to healthily and safely manage their lives.</p> <p>Additionally, funding to expand jail diversion services to serve 1,250 individuals with mental health needs in metro areas will reduce the costly burden on counties who are housing and medicating individuals in local jails.</p>
(6) Offender Health Care	\$72.7 million	\$102.1 million	Quality health care depends on two components – committed, well-trained professionals, and up-to-date equipment. TDCJ must offer competitive salaries in order to compete for quality health care staff. In addition, the aging of the incarcerated population necessitates dialysis machines, x-ray units, and other pieces of medical equipment that will be necessary to properly care for the onrush of geriatric prisoners.
(10) 500 DWI Treatment Slots	\$1.5 million	\$1.5 million	TDCJ housed 6,512 individuals for DWI convictions as of May 2014. It is critical that these individuals receive the programming and resources necessary to battle their substance abuse problems and reduce costly re-offending.
(11) Treatment for Remaining Intermediate Sanction Facilities (ISFs)	\$2.6 million	\$2.6 million	Individuals placed in ISFs have committed technical violations of their parole release; they are not revoked to prison. ISFs play an important role in recovery by providing substance abuse and cognitive behavioral treatment to individuals to help them better manage their transition back to their communities. Additional funding will enable treatment for ISF beds that do not currently offer it.
(2) Repair and Renovation of Facilities	\$30.0 million	\$30.0 million	TDCJ’s prisons do not have air conditioning, especially problematic as summer temperatures reach over 100 degrees Fahrenheit. Extreme heat on some units has been alleged to have contributed to recent deaths of incarcerated individuals; those conditions similarly endanger correctional officers.

			<p>Separately, continual breakdowns of wastewater facilities cause unsanitary environments, and there are credible reports of some units having difficulty providing non-contaminated drinking water.</p> <p>These issues must be addressed. Additional resources for facility rehabilitation will create safer, more humane working and living situations for guards, administrative staff, and incarcerated individuals alike.</p>
(12) Inspector General	\$1.4 million	\$1.4 million	While not providing true, independent oversight, the Office of the Inspector General is invaluable for its ability to investigate criminal behavior and its role in providing a safe environment for staff and incarcerated individuals.
(9) Additional Halfway House Beds	\$4.4 million	\$4.4 million	Thousands of individuals leave TDCJ each year without a place to live. Safe, affordable housing is crucial to people leaving prison, and many individuals who have otherwise qualified for parole cannot begin the transition to free-world life because they have no place to stay.