

Help Incarcerated Women Return Successfully to Our Communities

Program Accessibility and Expansion Will Give More Women an Equitable Shot on Reentry

Texas' 86th Legislature took strong first steps to expand in-prison programming for women. Specifically, HB 3227 required the Texas Department of Criminal Justice (TDCJ) to develop and implement policies that would increase and promote women's access to educational, vocational, substance use treatment, rehabilitation, life skills training, and pre-release programs.¹

Now, the Legislature must take the next step and ensure that programming is fully accessible, including in state jails. Women report a limited number of spaces in newer programs; for instance, the EWOP (Empowering Women Out of Prison) and STRIVE (Strength Through Restoration, Independence, Vision and Empowerment) programs are critical for women's successful reentry, but they are only offered at two women's units and have limited spaces. Furthermore, women are still restricted from obtaining master's degree-level education courses, which are available to men in TDCJ. Women must be able to get training for and access to jobs that are in demand and for which they are competitive applicants.

IN SHORT

HB 967 will help more women access in-prison rehabilitative programs and give them the same opportunities as men to take master's level education courses. This will ensure that women are strong workforce candidates on reentry, which will help them support their families and will reduce the likelihood of re-offending.

Success on reentry is built on stability, with education and job skills being a crucial component. We must equip women with the tools to live safe, productive, self-sustaining lives in the community. Doing so will stop the cycle of re-offending and re-incarceration that comes at great expense to taxpayers, families, and communities.

Key Findings

- As of January 2023, nearly 9,600 women were incarcerated in TDCJ.²
- Women face unique challenges when they are released from prison. Like all women, they are more likely to be providers and caregivers, whether to children, parents, or other family. In Texas, 81% of women in prison are mothers (versus 62% nationally).³
- In a survey by the Texas Center for Justice and Equity of incarcerated women in Texas, 65% had not graduated from high school or obtained a GED, with 35% completing less than 12th grade before entering TDCJ, and 11% not completing higher than 8th grade.⁴
- The EWOP program launched in fall 2019. It combines a strong educational curriculum with a proven reentry strategy – providing a certificate of entrepreneurship from the Wolff Center for Entrepreneurship at the University of Houston upon completion.⁵

The STRIVE program also launched in 2019. It provides gender-responsive, trauma-informed programming, career readiness skills, employment referrals, post-release supervision, and community support. But this class is just 12 weeks long.⁶

Continued on reverse.

Support HB 967 by Representative Allen

HB 967 increases access to and expands programming to meet the needs of incarcerated women. Specifically, it requires the Texas Department of Criminal Justice to:

- Develop and implement policies that require each facility to make certain programs – including parenting classes, as well as educational, vocational, substance use treatment, rehabilitation, life skills training, and prerelease programs – available and accessible to incarcerated women within 45 days of arriving at the facility.
- Ensure incarcerated women have access to the equitable program opportunities, including master's level education courses, that are available to incarcerated men.

The expansion of programs to *all* units, including state jails, will create an equal playing field of success upon reentry – better equipping women to support their families, while reducing the likelihood of re-offending and lowering costs associated with repeated involvement in the criminal punishment system.

Citations

¹ House Bill 3227 (Reps. Howard, Jarvis Johnson, Allen, White; sponsor: Sen. Huffman), *Relating to the availability of and access to certain programs and services for persons in the custody of the Texas Department of Criminal Justice*, 86th Texas Legislature, <https://capitol.texas.gov/BillLookup/history.aspx?LegSess=86R&Bill=HB3227>.

² Texas Department of Criminal Justice, *High Value Data Sets*, accessible here: https://www.tdcj.texas.gov/kss_inside.html.

³ Texas Center for Justice and Equity (TCJE), *Data on Women in Texas' Justice System*, <https://www.texascjc.org/data-women-texas-justice-system#:~:text=Women%20in%20TDCJ%20are%20far,68%25%20of%20men>.

⁴ TCJE, *An Unsupported Population: The Treatment of Women in Texas' Criminal Justice System*, April 2018, 6, <https://www.texascjc.org/system/files/publications/TCJC%20Womens%20Report%20Part%202.pdf>.

⁵ Empowering Women Out of Prison, *Our Program*, <https://www.ewoptx.org/our-program.html>.

⁶ Jolie McCullough, "New Texas prison program aims to help women leave the system with jobs waiting for them," *Texas Tribune*, September 25, 2019, <https://www.texastribune.org/2019/09/25/texas-prison-program-help-women-reenter-society-jobs-waiting-them/>.