



**Jorge Renaud**, Policy Analyst  
Work: (512) 441-8123, ext. 102  
Cell: (512) 825-6586  
jrenaud@TexasCJC.org  
www.TexasCJC.org

**FACT SHEET 2013**  
**H.B. 2811**

## **Encourage Volunteer Participation in Prisons**

### *Volunteer Programs Will Help Prepare Incarcerated Individuals for Post-Release Success, While Reducing Expenses at the Texas Department of Criminal Justice*

#### **TDCJ UNIT WARDENS SHOULD ENCOURAGE VOLUNTEERS TO PROVIDE PROGRAMMING**

In 2009, the 81<sup>st</sup> Legislature passed H.B. 1711, which mandated that the Texas Department of Criminal Justice (TDCJ) create a “comprehensive reentry and reintegration plan for offenders released or discharged from a correctional facility.”<sup>1</sup> One of the most important facets of this bill was the recognition that local communities must be involved in reentry, by providing “support from the community into which an offender is released or discharged, including support from agencies and organizations within that community.”<sup>2</sup>

One way to involve communities in the reentry and education process is to invite volunteers into prisons. Already, the Government Code explicitly mandates TDCJ to “actively encourage”<sup>3</sup> volunteer organizations to come into prison units and provide the following programming: literacy, education, job skills, life skills, parent-training, drug and alcohol rehabilitation, support group, arts and crafts, and other programs “determined to aid in the transitions between confinement and society and to reduce incidence of recidivism among inmates.”<sup>4</sup>

However, unit wardens are often so burdened by security and other unit operations that they may be unaware of additional opportunities that exist in their communities to help incarcerated individuals in their reentry efforts. A brief, yearly report detailing each warden’s efforts to identify and encourage volunteer programming will better help wardens recruit faith-based and volunteer organizations proven to be successful in providing meaningful programming for incarcerated individuals, while leading to long-term cost savings for TDCJ.

#### **KEY FINDINGS**

- TDCJ recruits volunteers on a department-wide basis, and although the programs within a given unit will depend on availability of local volunteers, TDCJ may recruit volunteers to offer programs that are not needed on particular units. Incarcerated individuals on a given unit have different needs, disabilities, or characteristics, and **unit wardens are best able to recognize those needs and reach out to local organizations that can address that specific need.**
- In 2011, the Legislature instituted budget cuts to the Windham School District (WSD) that resulted in the loss of 157 teachers.<sup>5</sup> Since education is such an important part of rehabilitation, it is even more **necessary for TDCJ to rely on volunteer-led efforts to supplement the educational services that were eliminated due to budget cuts.**

*Solution offered on reverse.*

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

- **H.B. 2811 will allow wardens to share critical programming information.** An annual report detailing what wardens have done on their units to identify and encourage volunteer programming will be a valuable tool for other wardens, who can then implement proven strategies to recruit similar volunteer organizations to help build the life and job-seeking skills needed by incarcerated individuals. It will also help to examine which volunteer services and programs work best with particular populations.
- **H.B. 2811 will help prepare incarcerated individuals for law-abiding, responsible lives after release.** By helping to build inmate skills and address their rehabilitative needs prior to leaving prison, this bill will improve the reentry process, cutting down on costly re-offending.
- **H.B. 2811 is cost-effective, allowing TDCJ to better use its limited reentry funds to help individuals prepare for successful transition back into their communities.** Volunteers work for free, and those who are trained and offer professional, evidence-based programs in certain areas will mean that TDCJ can focus its paid staff and other resources on work in more crucial areas, specifically in the Reentry Division. This policy will lead to a more efficient use of limited funds.
- **H.B. 2811 will lead to more positive relationships between prisons and local municipalities and organizations.** Veterans groups, faith-based organizations, local government agencies, and non-profit organizations that are encouraged to provide programming in prisons can later assist individuals during the critical reentry transition.

### Citations

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<sup>1</sup> Tx. Gov. CODE, §495.028

<sup>2</sup> Tx. Gov. Code, §495.028

<sup>3</sup> Tx. Gov. Code, §501.009

<sup>4</sup> Ibid.

<sup>5</sup> Mike Ward, "Prison school district in lawmaker's sights," *Austin American-Statesman*, January 24, 2013, <http://www.statesman.com/news/news/state-regional-govt-politics/prison-school-district-in-lawmakers-sights/nT6Qn/>.