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TESTIMONY 2013

H.B. 2812

Dear Members of the Committee,

Thank you for allowing me this opportunity to present testimony in favor of H.B. 2812, which will increase accountability and efficiency throughout Texas' parole and reentry systems through improved data collection, reporting, and tracking of outcomes.

### REPORTING & RECORDING WILL ENABLE PAROLE OFFICERS & REENTRY COORDINATORS TO ASSIST INDIVIDUALS AS THEY SAFELY REENTER TEXAS COMMUNITIES

As professionals assigned the duties of risk and needs assessment, supervision, and case management, parole officers and reentry coordinators are responsible for overseeing and assisting individuals who are transitioning from a correctional facility into the community.<sup>1</sup> However, without robust record-keeping, reporting requirements, or information sharing, it is difficult for state and local decision-makers to identify gaps in service delivery, or to ensure that parole officers and reentry coordinators are tracking their success in case management and supervision. Improved reporting systems and more publicly available data will increase accountability and strengthen the state's reentry infrastructure, better enabling returning individuals to access the tools they need to live successfully in the community. It will also help stakeholders identify parole officers and reentry coordinators who surpass their daily obligations, for recognition by their department or the state.

### BACKGROUND AND KEY FACTS

- **Current Individualized Reporting Requirements:** Currently, TDCJ maintains an electronic record in the Offender Information Management System (OIMS) for each inmate prior to release.<sup>2</sup> After individuals are released, their parole officers review certain relevant information in their OIMS record, and they are required to update that record with new information, such as special conditions or education,<sup>3</sup> or to verify counseling and employment.<sup>4</sup> However, information that parole officers review and input is often limited, and does not necessarily contain all important data on an inmate or previous inmate.
- **Current Reentry Coordinator Responsibilities:** Workforce and Reentry Coordinators perform case management and assist in developing and monitoring reentry programs targeted toward individuals leaving a correctional facility. They are expected to review and assess such individuals to identify reentry barriers, track their progress through case management, and develop reentry case plans. Importantly, their tasks also include: coordinating with appropriate agencies to obtain necessary identification documents; helping individuals obtain and apply for various reentry benefits and services; and serving as liaisons between program staff, government agencies, inmate families, support groups, and other organizations. For case management purposes, reentry coordinators also: develop and maintain records regarding participating individuals; document case records and review reports; and compile and analyze data and prepare summary reports.<sup>5</sup>
- **Current General Reporting Requirements:** Parole District Reentry Centers (DRCs) develop partnerships between institutional officers, parole officers, and the community to help facilitate reentry.<sup>6</sup> DRCs create a continuum of care in programming for eligible persons by providing such things as cognitive intervention, substance abuse education, anger management, and pre-employment preparation classes for unemployed parolees.<sup>7</sup> DRCs also require constant coordination between TDCJ divisions and community-based service providers, and the reporting requirements are fairly robust.<sup>8</sup> DRCs, however, are limited to qualified parolees, and their extensive communication efforts and reporting do not extend to all releasees.<sup>9</sup>

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## COST-SAVING AND PUBLIC SAFETY-DRIVEN SOLUTION: SUPPORT H.B. 2812 BY REPRESENTATIVE TOT

- **H.B. 2812 will increase efficiency and accountability** by requiring TDCJ's Reentry and Integration Division and Parole Division to submit **an annual joint report** to the state's Reentry Task Force, the Governor, the Lieutenant Governor, the Speaker of the House of Representatives, and the standing committees in the Senate and House of Representatives primarily responsible for criminal justice issues.<sup>10</sup> These reports will also be made available to the public.
- **H.B. 2812 will improve the efficacy of parole by clarifying the information each office should collect and track.** The annual joint report will capture the following parole data: (1) the number of referrals for employment, housing, medical care, treatment for substance abuse or mental illness, education, or other basic needs; (2) the outcomes of these referrals; (3) the identified areas where referrals are not possible due to unavailable resources or providers; (4) information on available community resources; and (5) data regarding parole officer training.
- **H.B. 2812 will improve the efficacy of the Reentry Division by clarifying the information that must be collected and monitored.** The annual joint report will capture the following reentry coordinator data: (1) the outcomes of programs and services that are available to releasees based on follow-up inquiries evaluating clients' progress after release; (2) the common reentry barriers identified during releasees' individual assessments, including in areas of employment, housing, medical care, treatment for substance abuse or mental illness, education, or other basic needs; (3) the common reentry benefits and services that reentry coordinators help releasees obtain or apply for; (4) information on available community resources; and (5) data regarding reentry coordinator training.

## CONCLUSION

Thank you again for allowing me the opportunity to testify in favor of this bill, which will help identify gaps in reentry services (especially in historically underserved areas), thus leading to a stronger reentry infrastructure in Texas that will enable returning individuals to access the tools they need to live successfully in the community.

## REFERENCES

<sup>1</sup> Under TEX. GOV. CODE § 508.001(7), a parole officer is a person "assigned the duties of assessment of risks and needs, investigation, case management, and supervision of releasees..."

<sup>2</sup> Under TEX. GOV. CODE § 508.152, TDCJ is required to create a record of an inmate's progress, detailing previous social history, physical and mental health, employment history, etc. See e.g., Texas Department of Criminal Justice (TDCJ) – Parole Division, "Case File Material Processing for Release," Policy and Operating Procedure Number PD/POP 2.1.13, 5 May 2011, p. 1.

<sup>3</sup> TDCJ – Parole Division, "Initial Interview," Policy and Operating Procedure Number PD/POP 3.1.1, 13 August 2009, pp. 3-4.

<sup>4</sup> See e.g., TDCJ – Parole Division, "Contact Standards for Regular Supervision of Cases," Policy and Operating Procedure Number PD/POP 3.2.8, 19 August 2009, pp. 2-3; TDCJ – Parole Division, "Offender Employment," Policy and Operating Procedure Number PD/POP 3.2.12, 1 September 2009.

<sup>5</sup> Texas Department of Criminal Justice, *Position Description: Case Manager III – Workforce and Reentry Coordinator*, 27 October 2009.

<sup>6</sup> TDCJ – Parole Division, "District Reentry Center (DRC) Administrative and Caseload Supervision Guidelines," Policy and Operating Procedure Number PD/POP-3.13.1, 30 August 2010.

<sup>7</sup> *Id.* p. 1.

<sup>8</sup> *Id.* pp. 10-11.

<sup>9</sup> Project RIO was a program that partnered parole divisions with community-based resources, through the Texas Workforce Commission, to help releasees obtain employment. It provided meaningful job support and helped guide parolees in their search for employment. While Project RIO no longer exists, its implementation and function demonstrated how developing relationships, maintaining ongoing communication, and reporting on these community resources can ensure that individuals have access to relevant services and necessary job assistance. Project RIO was statutorily implemented in TEX. LAB. CODE § 306.001-.008. The statute included a provision explicitly detailing "Data Sharing" to ensure information is adequately exchanged, see TEX. LAB. CODE § 306.008.

<sup>10</sup> This is generally consistent with the annual reporting requirements of the Board of Pardons and Paroles under TEX. GOV. CODE § 508.1445 and the reentry recidivism reporting requirements under TEX. GOV. CODE § 501.100.