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TESTIMONY 2013

H.B. 3533

Dear Members of the Committee,

Thank you for allowing me this opportunity to present testimony in favor of H.B. 3533. This policy will strengthen the family bonds between incarcerated individuals and their loved ones, resulting in a lesser likelihood of future re-offending, and enhance the safety and security of corrections units.

VISITATION BY LOVED ONES IS ESSENTIAL TO REHABILITATION; PROSPECTIVE VISITORS SHOULD BE INFORMED OF CHANGES TO VISITATION STATUS

Visitation is critical in helping incarcerated individuals maintain strong, healthy family units and meaningful relationships with children; through safe and appropriate interaction, visitation can also decrease aggression, thus improving security on prison units.¹ Unfortunately, disciplinary infractions can result in the denial of visitation privileges for individuals incarcerated in the Texas Department of Criminal Justice (TDCJ). In addition, emergency lockdowns imposed for security reasons may render entire groups of incarcerated individuals ineligible for visits. Sometimes it is impossible for incarcerated individuals to inform their next of kin that they are no longer allowed visits. For example, if an incarcerated individual is part of a group placed on lockdown, or is put on disciplinary action and denied visitation and phone call rights, that person will likely have no way of quickly reaching his or her loved ones to inform them that visitation is temporarily suspended.²

Many Texans who visit loved ones in TDCJ often travel long distances at great personal and financial expense. While this is a burden for all visitors, it is especially difficult for disabled individuals and the elderly. **When visitors are turned away due to visitation ineligibility, not only have the family members' time and financial resources been significantly impaired, but inmates' expectations for time spent with loved ones are frustrated, and their inability to notify family members and friends about suspended visitation may cause their loved ones to reconsider making future visits. Families may also lose confidence in TDCJ's ability to communicate effectively with them.**

H.B. 3533 requires TDCJ to inform an incarcerated individual's next-of-kin, as stated in that individual's visitation records, that a disciplinary action or unit disturbance has prohibited their visitation. This will ensure that family members do not waste their time and valuable financial resources by traveling hundreds of miles only to find that they cannot visit their loved one. H.B. 3533 will also facilitate stronger, more trusting relationships between TDCJ, Texas families, and incarcerated men and women.

KEY FINDINGS

- Family members who arrive at corrections facilities but are denied visitation may forego making future visits, thus reducing the positive impact on inmates and unit security created by meaningful visitation.³
- Visitation during incarceration is critical to reentry, having been shown to reduce recidivism by up to 25%.⁴ Again, transparency around visitation will facilitate ongoing opportunities for visits by loved ones.

Solution offered on reverse.

COST-SAVING AND PUBLIC SAFETY-DRIVEN SOLUTION: SUPPORT H.B. 3533 BY REPRESENTATIVE ROSE

H.B. 3533 requires the Texas Department of Criminal Justice to contact the next-of-kin of an inmate whose visitation eligibility has been suspended. This will inform potential visitors that there has been a change in an incarcerated individual's visitation eligibility, saving prospective visitors significant time and financial resources otherwise spent on a long trip to a correctional facility. Furthermore, this bill will reduce the risks of damaging personal relationships between inmates, visitors, and TDCJ staff by improving transparency in communication and reducing frustration for all parties involved.

CONCLUSION

Thank you again for allowing me the opportunity to testify in favor of this bill. It will greatly increase the confidence that the public has in TDCJ to provide timely, necessary information about incarcerated individuals, and it will allow family members of those individuals to reschedule unnecessary, expensive visits. The Texas Criminal Justice Coalition strongly urges you to support this bill.

Citations

¹ Appropriate play with children in a developmentally appropriate setting positively impacts attachment, increasing the probability of establishing stable, healthy relationships and in turn contributing to the safety and security of the unit. See William S. Pollack, "Parent-child connections: The essential component for positive youth development and mental health, safe communities and academic achievement," *New Directions for Youth Development*, vol. 2004 (103), 2004, pp. 17-30; information also taken from: Perry, B.D. (n.d.) Bonding and Attachment in Maltreated Children: Consequences of emotional neglect in childhood.

² TDCJ visitations are normally allowed on Saturdays and Sundays between 8:00 am and 5:00 pm. See Texas Department of Criminal Justice, *General Information Guide for Families of Offenders*, December 2012, p. 4.

³ See note 1.

⁴ Minnesota Department of Corrections, *The Effects of Prison Visitation on Offender Recidivism*, November 2011.