



WRITTEN TESTIMONY

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REGARDING INTERIM CHARGE:

*Review current parole supervision strategies to ensure that resources are being used efficiently
to maximize the state's need for public safety and rehabilitation*

HOUSE COMMITTEE ON CORRECTIONS

SEPTEMBER 2012

TEXAS CRIMINAL JUSTICE COALITION

The Texas Criminal Justice Coalition identifies and advances real solutions to the problems facing Texas' juvenile and criminal justice systems. We conduct policy research and analysis, form effective partnerships, and educate key stakeholders to promote effective management, accountability, and best practices that increase public safety, save taxpayer dollars, and preserve human and civil rights.

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Dear Members of the Committee,

My name is Ana Yáñez-Correa. I am the Executive Director for the Texas Criminal Justice Coalition (TCJC). I appreciate this opportunity to provide written testimony on the Committee's interim charge to *“Review current parole supervision strategies to ensure that resources are being used efficiently to maximize the state's need for public safety and rehabilitation.”*

INTRODUCTION TO PAROLE IN TEXAS

Nationally, the number of state and federal inmates released from prison more than quadrupled between 1980 and 2005; over two-thirds will be rearrested for a new offense within three years of their release, and over half will return to prison, most likely for having violated the conditions of their parole.¹

Texas has one of the largest parole systems in the country, supervising approximately 81,000 individuals each year.² One in 10 of those released from prison nationally call Texas home,³ and 17% of all parolees in the country are in Texas.⁴ Approximately 53% of those leaving the Texas Department of Criminal Justice (TDCJ) do so under mandatory supervision, parole, or community supervision.⁵ Figure 1 provides a snapshot of parole in Texas, highlighting numbers for some of the home counties of House Corrections Committee members.

FIGURE 1: PAROLE IN TEXAS			
County	Annual number of TDCJ releases⁶	Estimated annual releases to parole⁷	# Currently on parole⁸
Harris	14,304	6,500	16,888
Travis	2,666	1,100	3,137
Lubbock	956	525	1,603
El Paso	1,226	700	1,531
Nueces	1,550	600	1,448
Denton	877	475	971
Collin	776	350	702
Angelina	277	125	332
Hopkins	234	100	186
All Texas counties	71,063	33,518	81,101

As of July 2012, TDCJ's Parole Division employed 1,529 parole officers and an overall total of 2,148 individuals.⁹ The annual budget for the Division is \$155,561,513 (5% of TDCJ's overall budget), and budget allocations are based on historical expenditure trends and available funding.¹⁰ The Parole Division is divided into five regions. See Figure 2 for a region-based budget breakdown.

FIGURE 2: PAROLE DIVISION REGIONAL BUDGETS¹¹

Region	Salaries and other personnel costs	Operating expenses
Region I (Tyler)	\$13,876,263	\$3,989,210
Region II (Dallas)	\$18,371,912	\$4,112,549
Region III (Houston)	\$16,974,831	\$4,136,895
Region IV (San Antonio)	\$13,770,159	\$3,678,919
Region V (Midland)	\$8,719,636	\$2,359,289

The Parole Division oversees five major programs available in all five regions: Substance Abuse Programming (SA), Sex Offender Program (SO), Special Needs Offender Program (SNOP), District Reentry Center (DRC) Program, and Chaplaincy Counseling and Ministry and Volunteer Programs.¹² In addition, the Division works with Texas' 2-1-1 Workforce Solutions Centers to provide parolees with job search, interview, and resume-building skills.

The success rate for parolees in Texas is approximately 50%, which is close to the national average of 51%.¹³ Texas' parolee employment rate is 55%.¹⁴

SURVEYS AND STUDIES ON PAROLE IN TEXAS

After conducting an in-depth study of parole in Texas, and having collected survey responses from 280 parole officers and 297 parolees, TCJC has concluded that there are several areas of improvement.¹⁵ In the qualitative section of TCJC's parolee survey, many parolees commented that they do not have adequate access to the resources they need, and that Texas parole officers are over-emphasizing supervision.¹⁶ On the other hand, it is clear that parole officers genuinely want to help the individuals they supervise; they are simply not given the resources they need to do their jobs effectively and efficiently. These problems are fairly simple to correct on the front end, saving valuable tax dollars in the long term.

Academic and clinical research confirms TCJC's findings. For example, a recent study of Texas parole officers found that officers have an overwhelming desire for more treatment resources for the individuals they supervise.¹⁷ Similarly, a Houston-based study of men returning from prison found that 77% of parolees believe their parole officer has been helpful with their transition back into society.¹⁸ However, when asked how their parole officer was helpful, most responded by saying that the officer had been understanding or provided encouragement, rather than offering assistance with a job search or finding a drug treatment program.¹⁹ And although employment is statistically one of the most important aspects of successful reentry,²⁰ only 10% of individuals surveyed indicated that parole officers helped the parolee with his or her job search.²¹

The following recommendations, if implemented, will assist TDCJ's Parole Division in more efficiently using resources to maximize the state's capacity for supervision and case management, and meet Texas' needs for safety and rehabilitation.

POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

(1) Save valuable taxpayer dollars by beginning the reentry process as soon as an individual is granted parole.

Research shows the most successful reentry programs begin preparation and planning for individuals' return to the community while they are still incarcerated. Currently, the Parole Division has no pre-release authority; Institutional Parole Officers (IPO), under the supervision of the Texas Board of Pardons and Paroles, conduct virtually all pre-release planning.²² Given this practice, there is much opportunity to create a more meaningful continuity of care by ensuring needs are met ahead of time – thus facilitating a safe transition to the community.

For example, the Parole Division is currently working to establish a verified address for all parolees pre-release; however, resources such as medical and/or mental health care, public welfare benefits, and employment could be established before the parolee is released, helping him or her become and remain law-abiding and self-sufficient post-release. The inmate's IPO and future field parole officer must coordinate their efforts to secure resources ahead of each inmate's release date.

Identity documents (e.g., birth certificate, social security card, etc.) should also be secured pre-release – a critical but simple task that can assist returning inmates in finding employment and housing.²³ Providing these functions was once the nationally recognized role of Project RIO; in its absence, the Parole Division must carry the burden of developing a strong continuity of care for individuals returning to our communities.

(2) Support frontline staff by implementing evidence-based approaches to employee retention, and offer higher pay to parole officers.

TCJC's parole officer survey findings indicated that many parole officers feel they do not receive sufficient compensation for their job, nor do they feel appreciated by their supervisors;²⁴ this can negatively impact their work. A wealth of information exists on strategies for employee retention. The Parole Division should consider these options, including affordable workshops and trainings for employees.

The Parole Division should also offer managerial and leadership trainings for staff in supervisory positions, implement incentives to recruit employees with higher levels of education, support current employees in obtaining a higher level of education (e.g., social work degrees and other professional counseling licenses), offer higher pay and training to parole officers on a scale proportionate to level of risk, and explore additional, evidence-based strategies for retaining employees.

(3) Efficiently utilize resources by encouraging parole officers to seek training in evidence-based practices.

It is widely accepted that criminal justice professionals must employ evidence-based practices to be effective. Evidence-based practices “move us beyond what we ‘feel’ is (or should be) effective in offender treatment to what is supported by scientific evidence.”²⁵ The problem; however, is efficiently and correctly implementing evidence-based practices. An extensive

literature review of evidence-based parole supervision practices has indicated that **employing staff, supervisors, and managers who possess values, knowledge, and skill sets supportive of rehabilitation is one of the most important aspects of an intervention likely to reduce recidivism rates.**²⁶ As such, it is essential that parole officers are effectively trained and continue to receive the types of training that will be most beneficial to the work they do every day.

The Parole Division currently requires parole officers to take 20 hours of in-service training annually; only 5½ hours of this training in 2012 (and 5 hours in 2011) covered evidence-based practices.²⁷ (Furthermore, Division administrators must approve trainings outside of this mandate.²⁸) These training opportunities are not giving parole officers what they need. According to TCJC's parole officer survey, 48% of respondents indicated that training around incentive-based reentry programming would be beneficial; 37% said training in evidence-based therapeutic techniques (e.g., cognitive-behavioral therapy, trauma-informed care, strategic family-based therapy, etc.) would be beneficial; and 36% indicated that Spanish or other second language training would be beneficial.²⁹

The Reentry Policy Council recommends that all parole agencies train officers to understand and respond effectively to the special needs of parolees dealing with mental illness, substance abuse, and/or homelessness.³⁰ Other experts suggest parole officers engage in regular peer training,³¹ and that trainings be repeated annually. For example, one researcher claims, "Officers should not be expected to be experts in the usage of MI (motivational interviewing) and other evidence-based practices if they do not receive regular training to keep them on top of their skills."³² The Parole Division is currently developing systems for regular MI trainings;³³ however, these efforts must be bolstered to be effective. In addition to providing additional training opportunities, the Division should encourage parole officers to seek training that will benefit their local conditions and individual caseloads. Encouraging such opportunities will better equip parole officers to safely and effectively supervise released individuals, at little cost to the state.

(4) Increase public safety by reducing parole officer caseloads.

Significantly larger caseloads give parole officers limited time to focus on parolees as individuals, or to provide counseling or referrals to community agencies.³⁴ As a result, officers have little choice but to concentrate on surveillance and the impersonal monitoring of their clients.³⁵

Texas is currently struggling to keep parole caseloads manageable. A recent study of parole officers in Texas showed they have an overwhelming desire for smaller caseloads, so as to more effectively serve individuals under their supervision.³⁶ A respondent of TCJC's parole officer survey reiterated, "current 75 to 1 ratios are way out of line for [the] Parole Division."³⁷ This is one of many officers who claimed caseloads are unmanageable.

The numbers confirm what parole officers are reporting, and further indicate that the Division is overloading officers beyond the caseload recommendations set by the Legislative Budget Board. As of November 2011, TDCJ employed only 1,278 parole officers.³⁸ The following caseload recommendations³⁹ "are consistent with performance measures established by the Legislative Budget Board and funding appropriated by the Legislature:"⁴⁰

- 75:1 for non-specialized cases (Regular)
- 55:1 for Therapeutic Community cases (Substance Abuse)
- 45:1 for Special Needs cases
- 30:1 for Sex Offenders cases
- 25:1 for Electronically Monitored (EM) cases
- 14:1 for Super-Intensive Supervision (SISP) cases

Yet due to recent budget cuts and a lack of resources, parole officers are unable to meet these standards. As of November 2011, the following numbers⁴¹ represent the caseload for parole officers; each is higher than the recommended ratio:

Regular	76:1
Substance Abuse	74:1
Special Needs	51:1
Sex Offender	35:1
EM	29:1
SISP	17:1

Policy-makers should ensure that officer-to-parolee ratios are consistent with performance measures and best practices for more effective public safety and parolee outcomes. Ultimately, it is imperative that officers provide meaningful case management not only for parolees on special caseloads, but for all individuals on parole.

In addition to public safety gains, investing in staffing on the front end yields savings on the back end. Between 2010 and 2011, Texas spent almost \$150 million incarcerating individuals returned to prison from parole; these are individuals who were on impossibly high caseloads and likely did not receive the individual care and attention they needed. Policy-makers and TDCJ administrators should ensure that parole officers are given the tools they need to effectively do their jobs, including with manageable caseloads.

(5) Track parolee progress to identify gaps in Texas' reentry infrastructure.

To facilitate successful reentry and augment recent efforts to improve the reintegration process, parole officers should be required to maintain detailed monthly reports related to each person under their supervision, whether on regular or specialized caseloads. Specifically, parole officers should track and record the following items on a monthly basis: (1) the number of home visits conducted; (2) the number of times the officer has offered referral assistance, per parolee; (3) each housing placement, identifying the parolee's county of residence and confirming his or her housing placement; (4) any job assistance provided through the parole office, including résumé building or interview skills, and the number of job interviews facilitated on behalf of parolees; (5) each employment placement, including referrals and confirmation of employment; (6) each treatment placement, including referrals and confirmation of placement; (7) the type of medical services and needs that are provided on a monthly basis; (8) any educational assistance or resources provided; (9) the number of individuals outfitted with appropriate clothing and furnished necessities to maintain proper hygiene; (10) methods used to adjust placement based

on individual progress, needs, and risks; (11) any other day-to-day necessity furnished by or facilitated through the parole office, or other services provided.

Furthermore, parole officers should do the following: (1) keep and update a monthly list of resources for parolees, including medical, housing, community-based service providers, etc.; (2) create a continually updated list of community members and service providers with whom the parole officer has developed a working relationship; (3) identify and maintain a continually updated list of employers and education providers willing to work with parolees; and (4) track any training the parole officer receives. Any resource information collected, including new working relationships with service providers, should be exchanged with other parole offices and officers.

Lastly, the Regional and District Parole Offices should collect parole officers' individualized and general reports and, in turn, submit a quarterly report, containing a detailed synthesis of the monthly reports, to the state's Reentry Task Force, TDCJ's Reentry and Integration Division, 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.⁴² The monthly and quarterly reports should also be made available to the public.

Increasing access to this information will help stakeholders identify gaps in service delivery in various regions, as well as help parole officers track their success in case management and supervision. It will also help stakeholders identify parole officers who surpass their daily obligations, for recognition by their department or the state.

(6) Create evidence-based tools for personal responsibility by separating case management/social work positions from supervisory positions within the Parole Division.

Research shows that a balance between supervision and case management/social work produces the best results for parolees, parole officers, and society.⁴³ However, most parole officers find it difficult to strike this balance.⁴⁴ The role conflict arises from the two sides of a parole officer's duties: to enforce the law and to help the parolee.⁴⁵ Unfortunately, for most parole officers, an inability to reconcile these roles leads to an over-emphasis on authoritarian supervision, oftentimes leading to burn-out and impersonal treatment of parolees.⁴⁶

This problem is evident in Texas. For example, District Reentry Center (DRC) officers are only required to complete two Division-run trainings in preparation for facilitating any of the classes held at DRCs, including wide-ranging topics from Pre-Employment Preparation to Cognitive Intervention and Substance Abuse Education.⁴⁷ Unless officers take personal initiative to seek professional-level training, they are under-qualified to provide therapeutic interventions to parolees. Not only is this likely to damage a parolee's access to services, it puts expectations on parole officers beyond their capabilities. As noted above, situations such as these are likely to result in more authoritarian supervision.⁴⁸

This problem is reflected in TCJC's parole officer and parolee surveys.⁴⁹ Most parole officers (58%) believe that their primary job function is a balance between parolee supervision and case management/social work, whereas most parolees (49%) see their parole officers doing mostly

supervision (compared to 40% who believe parole officers strike a balance between supervision and case management/social work). Very few from either group believe the role of a parole officer is solely case management/social work (only 19% of parole officers and 11% of parolees claimed so). One parolee survey respondent said, “I feel that parole officers do not identify with parole. It’s ‘do this or go back to jail’ with them.” Another commented, “I strongly believe that if there were more of a balance between supervision and case management/social work parolees would be more successful.”

Over-emphasizing supervision can be detrimental for a parolee’s chances at long-term success in the community. Additionally, a supervisory orientation can be frustrating for parole officers who genuinely want to help the individuals on their caseload but are not seeing results. Parole officers who have difficulty balancing these roles are likely to have strained, and potentially damaged, relations with the individuals they supervise. This creates a situation in which the case management work they are doing is not effective. According to one group of researchers, when providing services such as substance abuse programming, mental health treatment, or case management, the client-provider relationship contributes to 30% of the behavioral change.⁵⁰

TCJC recommends that the Parole Division break up these two job functions. Every parole officer should have a case manager. Parolees could meet with this case manager more regularly if they had higher needs or would like more assistance in obtaining resources. Parole officers could handle supervisory tasks such as confirming employment, conducting drug and alcohol tests, making home visits to confirm conditions are being met, etc. In order to support this transition, parole officers currently employed with the Division should receive incentives to attain social work degrees and other professional counseling licenses; current employees should be prioritized in these new roles, based equally on education and a history of emphasizing case management/social work in supervising parolees.

If this recommendation is not viable, the Parole Division should diversify its workforce by recruiting and hiring more individuals with counseling, case management, and/or social work backgrounds.

(7) Support the use of evidence-based practices by strengthening the Parole Division’s approach to positive reinforcement over negative or punishment-based sanctions.

As noted above, most intensive supervision programs either explicitly or implicitly encourage authoritative supervision strategies, an approach that has been proven to be ineffective in reducing recidivism.⁵¹ For example, an evaluation of an electronic monitoring program combined with intensive drug and alcohol treatment revealed that electronic monitoring did not change parolees’ likelihood of recidivating, though there were significantly lower recidivism rates among treatment participants.⁵²

The original intention of parole supervision was not to revoke parole or sanction parolees, but constantly assess the parolee’s progress, make necessary changes, and work with parolees to successfully reintegrate them into society by any means.⁵³ However, over the last 30-40 years, parole in the United States has undergone a cultural shift from emphasizing social work/case management to emphasizing surveillance.⁵⁴ The purpose of parole has been modified as parole

boards and administrators have prioritized managing risk and intensively monitoring returning individuals.

While there has been some attempt to reverse this tendency in Texas, surveillance still outweighs social work/case management. Recall that TCJC's survey findings indicate that most parolees believe parole officers largely focus on supervision.⁵⁵ Similarly, in response to a series of questions for the Parole Division, Division Director Stuart Jenkins was asked to list program success measurements. Mr. Jenkins responded, "Success is measured in terms of attendance, client compliance, successful program completion, no new arrests or convictions, etc." However, in the very next question, TCJC asked Mr. Jenkins to provide *success* rates and he responded, "Recidivism rates for all offenders is at 23%."

There is clearly a schism between what the Division would like to emphasize (positive reinforcement) and what it is practically tracking and applying (supervision-based, negative or punishment-based sanctions). This is despite evidence suggesting that an emphasis on supervision alone does not affect recidivism rates, whereas case management/social work does decrease recidivism rates.⁵⁶ One extensive literature review of evidence-based parole supervision practices identified an emphasis on "positive reinforcers rather than negative or punishment-based sanctions" as one of the most important aspects of an intervention likely to reduce recidivism rates.⁵⁷ Furthermore, an increase in parole revocations does not necessarily increase public safety,⁵⁸ and relapse or temporary regressions into anti-social behavior do not necessarily correspond to an increased likelihood that a person will commit new crimes.⁵⁹ The Reentry Policy Council finds that a substantial number of parolees violate conditions, and argues that there is not a correlation between a condition violation and an increase in criminal behavior.⁶⁰

Experts suggest a 4:1 positive to negative reinforcement ratio; positive reinforcements that are administered four times as often as negative reinforcements are "optimal for promoting behavior changes."⁶¹ Parole officers should employ this 4:1 ratio in efforts to better ensure that parolees successfully meet their conditions of parole and lower their risk of re-offending in the long term.

The Reentry Policy Council's findings support this recommendation: treatment-oriented interventions, or responses that reward positive behaviors, have shown greater promise than negative reinforcement alone.⁶² The Council offers the following⁶³ as possible examples of rewards for positive behavior:

- Verbal praise
- Recognition by service clubs or faith organizations
- Graduation ceremonies
- Certificates of achievement
- Letters of recommendation
- Sobriety anniversary celebrations
- Opportunities for leadership
- Gift certificates or other financial incentives
- Reduction in fines owed or mandatory community service work hours

- Restoration of civil rights
- Removal of an electronic tracking or monitoring device
- Reduction in or elimination of drug testing

The following is one example of a parole supervision model that effectively utilizes positive reinforcement.

- Parole officers with the **Georgia Board of Pardons and Paroles** use a Behavior Response and Adjustment Guide to assist them in determining responses to violations and rewards for positive behavior. Rewards include letters of recognition, certificates of completion, six-month compliance certificates, supervision level reduction, and reduced reporting requirements.⁶⁴

(8) Effectively use risk assessment tools to identify individuals who should be intensively supervised and offered more services, and provide free, optional services to lower-risk individuals.

An over-emphasis on supervision can actually harm parolees; studies show that low-risk individuals given intensive treatment and supervision will have increased recidivism rates.⁶⁵ Matching risk level to supervision and programming is key. One extensive literature review of evidence-based parole supervision practices identified “providing intensive services to high-risk, rather than low-risk, offenders,” as one of the most important aspects of an intervention likely to reduce recidivism rates.⁶⁶

A validated assessment tool is critical to identifying parolees’ needs, and the full implementation of such a tool in Texas would result in better outcomes. In TCJC’s parolee survey, many respondents commented that their conditions do not meet their needs.⁶⁷ For example, some individuals were assigned Condition S (for individuals with substance abuse issues) but had very little experience with drugs or alcohol. Furthermore, many parolees identified substance abuse treatment as the number one resource referred to them by their parole officer, despite needing other resources, such as employment options, medical care, etc.

The following are two examples of supervision bodies that appropriately use risk assessment tools within their respective parole divisions.

- The **Pennsylvania Board of Probation and Parole** has developed a statewide uniform procedure for risk assessments, using research-based tools that emphasize the reentry process. The agency has a separate risk assessment instrument for sex offenders.⁶⁸
- The **Georgia State Board of Pardons and Paroles** uses a Results-Driven Supervision model that assesses parolees for criminogenic traits, matching them with the intervention programs that most highly correlate to reductions in recidivism. This has encouraged parole officers to shift productivity measures from a contract-driven surveillance model to a results/outcome-focused treatment and surveillance combination. The state has a 71% parolee success rate, compared to 51% (the national average), and 50% (Texas’ rate).⁶⁹

(9) Involve families, friends, and loved ones of parolees in the reentry process from beginning to end.

Research shows that incarcerated individuals who maintain contact with supportive family members are more likely to have better employment and reduced drug use than those who do not.⁷⁰ A Houston-based study of men returning from prison found that family members were a key resource, providing them cash, food, and emotional support.⁷¹ In fact, despite pre-release surveys identifying housing and employment as the most important factors in staying out of prison, it is actually support from families that proved imperative for this group post-release.⁷² Results from another survey indicated that for incarcerated individuals, gaining the trust of their family and lessening the negative impact of incarceration on their children is second in importance only to finding a job.⁷³

Academic research supports these findings. Studies show that involving families and loved ones in an individual's recovery plan is an effective way to support new behaviors.⁷⁴ Similarly, an Urban Institute investigation found that previously incarcerated individuals who reported closer relationships with family members after release were less likely to use drugs, and more likely to find work.⁷⁵ For many parolees, being close to family is a good way to avoid triggering situations; individuals are much less likely to come across drugs, alcohol, opportunities for prostitution and theft, etc., when they are spending time with their children and other loved ones.

Communities throughout Texas would greatly benefit from Parole Division policies that require a parole officer to actively facilitate relationship-building among a parolee and his or her family members.

One way to include families in reentry planning is to utilize evidence-based practices like strategic family therapy (where family members are part of a parolee's therapy sessions) to support individuals in making positive life choices.⁷⁶ Indeed, family-based therapies are among the most successful types of interventions to reduce recidivism.⁷⁷ This process can begin inside a correctional facility, as soon as individuals are granted release, and continue through parole supervision.

Policy-makers and Parole Division administrators should research other ways to involve loved ones in an individual's release plan.

The following is a list of programs that can serve as models for Texas.

- The **Pennsylvania Family Support Alliance** runs family support groups, including role-play and elements of interactive sessions that stress real-life situations.⁷⁸ These groups are co-facilitated by a social worker, counselor, or criminal justice professional alongside a parent from the community.⁷⁹ Post-release, 98% of participants reported having a better relationship with their children as a result of participating in the group.⁸⁰
- **Pennsylvania's Furlough Program** safely provides incarcerated individuals an opportunity, as part of a pre-release reentry strategy, to stay at home with family members

on weekends and holidays. The program allows furloughs for individuals staying in halfway houses post-release for up to seven days. There are similar programs in New York, California, and the Federal Bureau of Prisons systems.⁸¹ Research indicates that such programs may reduce recidivism and will likely facilitate stronger familial bonds.⁸²

- The **Missouri Department of Corrections** developed a **Transition from Prison to Community Initiative** in which every individual serving a sentence will work with a case management team to develop a two-phase Transition Accountability Plan. Phase two of the Plan guides the inmate from incarceration through reentry into the community and the team consists of corrections staff, the field probation or parole officer, representatives from state- and community-based service providers, community leaders, and members of the individual's family.⁸³
- **La Bodega de la Familia in New York City** has developed a system of family case management as well as other tools to engage families with a loved one on parole. La Bodega emphasizes building trust among probation and parole agencies, social service providers, family members, and the released individual.⁸⁴ This program has reduced substance abuse rates by 42%, illegal drug use by 21%, and recidivism rates by 50% among program participants.⁸⁵

(10) Invest in what works by emphasizing employment-based parole supervision and programming.

Employment is widely considered a centerpiece of the reentry process, with evidence that steady work can reduce crime incentives.⁸⁶ Overwhelmingly, parole officers and parolees in Texas identify employment options as the number one barrier to a successful reentry. According to TCJC's parole officer and parolee surveys, employment options are the most needed resource for parolees in Texas.⁸⁷ One parolee commented, "Parole should be more active in helping parolees acquire a job."⁸⁸

Project RIO, a program that, among other things, provided intensive employment services for previously incarcerated individuals, produced positive results. RIO participants were twice as likely to have found employment, and rates of re-arrest and re-imprisonment were significantly reduced.⁸⁹ While it may not be feasible to restore RIO, policy-makers must acknowledge the vast amounts of research indicating that employment is a critical factor in successfully reentering the community. Front-end investments in job placement programs will have back-end savings when individuals stay out of prison or jail.

The Parole Division should ensure that parole officers are attempting to place individuals in employment; in Project RIO's absence, this responsibility falls on the Division. Furthermore, the Division should not rely on Project Workforce to do its job. Currently, no policies require parole officers to proactively identify or build relationships with employers that will hire parolees. While there are individual parole officers doing this work (who should be acknowledged for doing so), the practice must be uniform across the Division.

Parole officers should also serve as intermediaries between the parolee and the employer. According to one researcher, "Intermediaries function as liaisons between employers and ex-

offenders, often making first contact with employers, discussing the employer's staffing needs, and evaluating the possible fit between the employer and the particular ex-offender job seeker."⁹⁰ Additionally, the Parole Division could make better use of the Federal Bonding Program, an underutilized Department of Labor program that insures previously incarcerated employees.⁹¹

Finally, parole officers should take a greater role in ensuring job retention. Statistics show that only 38% of parolees are likely to retain the same job for six continuous months.⁹² This must be significantly improved. A Houston-based reentry study found that individuals who worked within six months after release were less likely to be reincarcerated than those who went six months without a job.⁹³ Parole officers should provide ongoing support to ensure employment retention, including developing systems for long-term employment-based incentives. One group of researchers calls for continual assistance for unemployed previously incarcerated individuals, claiming, "Without guidance and support, the search for unemployment is likely to be a very frustrating journey with many dead-ends and short-lived jobs."⁹⁴

Research shows that parole officers can have an exceptionally positive impact on the employment rate of the individuals they supervise;⁹⁵ however, TDCJ's Parole Division must make a concerted effort to incorporate this into its work.

Below are some examples of successful employment-based reentry models.

- The **Crime Prevention Institute (CPI)**, formerly located in **Travis County**, closed its doors in 2011 due to lack of funding. CPI utilized a 12-week evidence-based cognitive behavioral therapy curriculum inside the Travis County State Jail, and provided case management, post-release supportive services, and employment-based cash incentives.⁹⁶ The program yielded a 70% employment rate; of those who acquired employment, 75% remained employed, full-time, for 90 days. Of those who completed the program, only 12% recidivated; this is compared to a 33% recidivism rate for the general state jail population.⁹⁷ While this program was housed in a state jail setting, there is much overlap between the CPI clientele and certain parolees.
- The **Georgia State Board of Pardons and Paroles** uses a Results-Driven Supervision model that identifies employment as a success outcome. Parolees who do not have jobs receive immediate and consistent attention. Georgia parolees have a 71% parole completion rate, compared to 51% (the national average) and 50% (Texas' rate).⁹⁸
- The **Durham Chamber of Commerce** in **North Carolina** has partnered with the **Durham Reentry Initiative** to hire an employment specialist to market the program to employers and help them access resources such as the federal bonding program, tax credits, and on-the-job training incentives.⁹⁹

(11) Invest in long-term reentry success by “Banning the Box” statewide for felonies seven or more years old.

More than 60% of employers, having legitimate concerns for safety, claim they would not knowingly hire an applicant with a criminal background.¹⁰⁰ Policy-makers must balance society’s interest in employing parolees with the desire to safeguard employers.

A relatively new criminal justice strategy to safely increase employment options for previously incarcerated individuals focuses on removing questions pertaining to felony histories during the first step of an application process, also known as “Ban the Box” initiatives.¹⁰¹ Evidence suggests this approach is effective and supports a reduction in crime,¹⁰² when effectively promoted through grassroots, community advocacy efforts.¹⁰³

Delaying questions about past convictions until later in the hiring process gives men and women with a criminal record a chance to make a positive first impression on potential employers, emphasizing their current skills over their past mistakes.¹⁰⁴ In areas where its success has been tracked, “Ban the Box” is shown to have helped previously incarcerated individuals get jobs.¹⁰⁵ According to 2009 estimates, nearly half of all parolees in Texas were unemployed.¹⁰⁶ Furthermore, the jobless rate among parolees is, on average, nine times higher than among the general population.¹⁰⁷ “Ban the Box” policies may reduce chronic unemployment among people with criminal records, making it easier for them to be economically successful and crime-free.

In fact, people with steady employment are less likely to re-offend or violate conditions of their parole,¹⁰⁸ meaning “Ban the Box” policies can decrease criminal activity. And indeed, comparing crime two years immediately before and after hiring policies changed shows that, in most cities studied, crime went down with “Ban the Box” in place.¹⁰⁹

Cost savings can also accrue with smarter employment policies. Lowering recidivism rates saves states, counties, and businesses money. When individuals work and support themselves and their families, state and community agencies have lower social service costs. Stable employment also helps previously incarcerated individuals pay back the billions owed in child support and restitution to the state.¹¹⁰ Furthermore, these policies benefit employers by widening their applicant pool and saving resources formerly used for processing expensive, possibly unnecessary, background checks.¹¹¹

To increase safety for employers and boost local cost savings, TCJC recommends that a statewide “Ban the Box” policy remove from applications questions about felonies seven or more years old. There is sound evidence indicating that the risk of re-offending goes down six or seven years after the offense.¹¹² One team of researchers writes, “after six or seven years from an arrest, the likelihood of offending for young men looks quite similar to those with no criminal history.”¹¹³

As noted above, employment is an extremely important aspect of successful reentry; policy-makers should ensure that parolees have access to the tools they need to make positive life decisions, including safely opening up employment options, while balancing concerns for employers’ safety.

The following are two successful initiatives that could be replicated statewide in Texas.

- **Travis County’s Offender Workforce Development Program** helps previously incarcerated individuals prepare for and find employment through job skills training, one-on-one consultation, and job fairs. Travis County also developed a set of “Guidelines for Hiring Ex-Offenders” in an attempt to view previously incarcerated individuals holistically. The program has placed thousands of returning individuals in employment and has helped lower the crime rate in Travis County.¹¹⁴
- In **Minneapolis, “Ban the Box”**¹¹⁵ policies led to a nearly 60% employment rate among previously incarcerated individuals.

(12) Stop the cycle of victimization by implementing specialized programming and interventions for women on parole.

Policy-makers in Texas must address the specific needs of the 8,000 women on parole.¹¹⁶ Many incarcerated and previously incarcerated women have a history of physical and sexual abuse, psychiatric disorders and other mental health issues, and substance dependence. Furthermore, women tend to have a more difficult time with reentry and higher recidivism rates than men.¹¹⁷

Despite the benefits of gender-specific programming, the Parole Division does not have any policies that encourage parole officers to tailor supervision methods based on the gender of the parolee. Furthermore, according to Parole Division Director Stuart Jenkins, the Division “does not match parolees with officers of the same gender unless there are extenuating circumstances,” despite over half the parole officer workforce being female.¹¹⁸ Currently, volunteers conduct the only gender-specific programming available to parolees.¹¹⁹

A reentry plan should implement treatment and trauma-informed programming in all-female settings, where women may feel more nurtured, supported, and comfortable when speaking about issues like domestic violence, sexual abuse and incest, shame, and self-esteem.¹²⁰ These programs should address the many complicated physical, emotional, and social factors that affect women’s abuse and recovery.¹²¹

Many mental health experts argue for a trauma-informed care approach in treating women with mental illness and/or substance abuse histories.¹²² Such an approach recognizes the importance of trauma in women’s psychological development, avoids triggering trauma-based reactions, and supports coping capacities.¹²³ The National GAINS Center for People with Co-Occurring Disorders in the Justice System specifies, “Women with trauma histories are encouraged to develop skills needed to recover from traumatic experiences and build healthy lives. These may include cognitive, problem-solving, relaxation, stress coping, relapse prevention, and short- or long-term safety planning skills.”¹²⁴

Significantly, one group of researchers found that women who receive such gender-specific, trauma-informed care while incarcerated are 360% more likely to complete voluntary community-based treatment upon release and 67% less likely to return to prison than women

who received gender neutral or male-based therapeutic care treatment.¹²⁵ Other researchers have discovered similar results using gender-specific post-release treatment models.¹²⁶

For women transitioning out of confinement and onto parole, corrections facilities should offer particularized, pre-release programming with specific components, including training in parenting, communication skills, and cognitive thinking; assistance in building self-esteem and strengthening self-care skills; provision of basic information on legal rights in regard to reuniting with children, and on dealing with domestic violence; referrals to other agencies for assistance with housing and areas of particular importance to women with children; and support services and emergency assistance for basic necessities.

Despite the high-risk position of many women returning from TDCJ, there are few programs in Texas that specifically target this population and include gender-appropriate intervention models. Policy-makers should stop the cycle of victimization by supporting treatment for women. Such strategies will effectively curb recidivism, ultimately reducing prison and jail populations and costs.

The following is one example of a successful gender-specific reentry program.

- The **Forever Free Program** in **California** is a women-centered reentry program that includes 12-step elements, cognitive-behavioral therapy, and a six-month post-release residential community program. Participants are three times as likely to be employed and 25% less likely to use drugs or alcohol upon completion of the program.¹²⁷

(13) Empower communities to solve local problems by bolstering strategic partnerships and community collaborations.

Service coordination is one of the most important aspects of successful reentry; one team of social workers has coined this strategy “community-level practice.”¹²⁸ The community at-large has the most at stake when an individual is released from incarceration; as such, the Parole Division should work with advocates to develop strategies to incorporate the community in release and supervision practices. In addition, the Division should more efficiently use its resources by consistently communicating and working alongside established community programs and leaders.

Separately, parole officers should directly manage interactions between the correctional, mental health, and judicial staff.¹²⁹ Where resources are not available for additional staff, communication gaps could be bridged through data-sharing software that records the most effective medications, treatment plans, and intervention models for individuals that frequent both mental health and jail facilities.¹³⁰

The following are model community partnership programs that the Parole Division and policy-makers could consider for implementation in Texas.

- The **National Institute of Corrections** has created “Guidelines for Developing a Criminal Justice Coordinating Committee,” which encourage local and state policy-makers to

collaborate with local judiciaries, law enforcement, community groups, and other stakeholders to communicate regularly, share resources, and fill gaps in services.¹³¹ Counties in Texas, such as Wichita County,¹³² have begun implementing this model, saving their communities millions of dollars.

- The **Maryland Parole Commission** has formed a joint committee with the Maryland judiciary to identify cases that overlap between the parole system and courts, so as to support communication and strengthen sentencing and parole supervision strategies.¹³³
- **Project Reconnect** in **Dallas** is a collaboration between various TDCJ and criminal justice entities, social and medical service providers, faith-based community organizations, and the Dallas community at-large. The program provides reentry case management and community referrals to help parolees with nonviolent offenses settle back into their community. Since its inception in 2005, Project Reconnect has reduced criminal justice and housing costs and contributed to a lower crime rate in Dallas.¹³⁴
- The **Michigan Prisoner Reentry Initiative** (MPRI) is a state policy team led by the Governor's Criminal Justice Policy Advisor. The program facilitates communication and coordination among state-level agencies and local organizations, balancing state policy with local conditions. Each regional MPRI branch partners with local service providers to meet the specific needs of parolees in its area. MPRI has been a major contributor to lower recidivism rates, thus helping to reduce the prison population and saved the state millions of dollars.¹³⁵
- The **Massachusetts Continuity of Care Record** is a computerized format that shares summary health records between community service providers (in compliance with HIPAA standards). The goal of the project is to enable a provider to easily access an individual's medical and mental health history. This model could be implemented across service provider and criminal justice lines; the Harris County Jail system is currently developing a similar record-keeping system.¹³⁶
- **Out4Life** in **Louisiana** is a partnership between the Louisiana Prison Fellowship and the state's Department of Public Safety and Corrections; it organizes existing faith-based and community groups to meet the needs of returning individuals both inside and outside prison walls. Out4Life has developed a referral system to share information across service providers and it seamlessly communicates with corrections staff releasing and supervising returning individuals. Since the program relies on already existing organizations, there is no additional cost to the state.¹³⁷
- **Utah's Community Review Boards** review technical parole violations. The Boards consist of state and local service providers, law enforcement staff, citizen representatives, and community leaders. Board members are trained to respond to violations via graduated sanctions, and they employ methods like restorative justice.¹³⁸
- **INCITE!**, a national group, advocates for community accountability as a strategy for addressing violence within the community. Drawing on evidence-based practices such as restorative justice, the program encourages community organizations to build relationships

with neighborhoods to create a multi-pronged strategy and support network. INCITE! seeks to prevent violence from occurring and turns to the individuals who have the power to hold individuals accountable: those who live in the individual's own community.¹³⁹

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In recent years, Texas has begun an intentional shift away from punishment and negative reinforcement toward an evidence-based parole supervision model. Local and state policy-makers should continue this trend, providing parolees with the tools they need to make positive choices and become productive members of society. Such an approach will more effectively utilize resources and promote safer communities in Texas.

Thank you for allowing me the opportunity to provide information on parole supervision strategies.

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- ¹²² Nena Messina, Christina E. Grella, Jerry Cartier, and Stephanie Torres, “A Randomized Experimental Study of Gender-Responsive Substance Abuse Treatment for Women in Prison,” *Journal of Substance Abuse Treatment* 38, 2010.
- ¹²³ Messina, *A Randomized Experimental Study of Gender-Responsive Substance Abuse Treatment for Women in Prison*.
- ¹²⁴ Clark, *Addressing Histories of Trauma and Victimization through Treatment*.
- ¹²⁵ Clark, *Addressing Histories of Trauma and Victimization through Treatment*.
- ¹²⁶ Begun, Rose, and Lebel, *Intervening with Women in Jail*.
- ¹²⁷ Information on this program from Michael L. Prendergast, “Prison-Based Therapeutic Community Treatment: The California Experience,” UCLA Integrated Substance Abuse Program, Criminal Justice Research Group, slides 3, 4, 6,

<http://www.saprp.org/PowerPointPres/Prendergast0304.pdf>. Also see Messina, Grella, Cartier, and Torres, *A Randomized Experimental Study of Gender-Responsive Substance Abuse Treatment*, *supra* note 88 at 98.

¹²⁸ Darrell P. Wheeler and George Patterson, "Prisoner Reentry," *Health & Social Work* 33, no. 2 (May 2008): 145-146.

¹²⁹ Henry J. Steadman, "A Key Component for the Effective Interaction of the Justice and Mental Health Systems," *Law and Human Behavior* 16, no. 1, 1992, p. 76.

¹³⁰ One such secure data sharing software is ServicePoint from Bowman Systems. See

<http://www.bowmansystems.com/products/servicepoint> for more information.

¹³¹ To access the National Corrections Institute's "Guidelines for Developing a Criminal Justice Coordinating Committee," visit <http://static.nicic.gov/Library/017232.pdf>.

¹³² *Times Record News*, November 29, 2011, <http://www.timesrecordnews.com/news/2011/nov/29/county-jail-has-fewer-inmates/>.

¹³³ Burke, *Collaboration for Successful Prisoner Reentry: The Role of Parole and the Courts*.

¹³⁴ Information on this program from Project Reconnect Housing Program,

http://www.dallascityhall.com/pdf/ehs/ProjectReconnect_brochure.pdf; also see TCJC, "Project Reconnect: A Model Reentry Program in Dallas," available upon request.

¹³⁵ Information on this program from Reentry Policy Council, *Report of the Re-Entry Policy Council: Charting the Safe and Successful Return of Prisoners to the Community*, p. 59; also see Michigan Prisoner ReEntry Initiative, "The Michigan Prisoner ReEntry Initiative: A Success Story,"

http://www.michigan.gov/documents/corrections/The_Michigan_Prisoner_Reentry_Initiative_A_Success_Story_334863_7.pdf.

¹³⁶ Information on this program from Reentry Policy Council, *Report of the Re-Entry Policy Council: Charting the Safe and Successful Return of Prisoners to the Community*, p. 285.

¹³⁷ Information on this program from James M. LeBlanc and Pat Nolan, "Partners for Successful Reentry," *Corrections Today* (December 2009): 58-59, 71.

¹³⁸ Information on this program from Reentry Policy Council, *Report of the Re-Entry Policy Council: Charting the Safe and Successful Return of Prisoners to the Community*, p. 400-1.

¹³⁹ INCITE!, "Organizing for Community Accountability,"

http://www.incite-national.org/media/docs/6685_toolkitrev-cmtyacc.pdf.