

BILL ANALYSIS

Senate Research Center

H.B. 2837
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Criminal Justice
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Engrossed

AUTHOR'S/SPONSOR'S STATEMENT OF INTENT

Numerous studies have shown reduced recidivism rates for employed ex-offenders. Even when one takes into account other factors such as age, risk score, race/ethnicity, and type of previous offense, post-release employment reduced re-arrests and re-incarcerations.

A key element of this strategy is Project RIO, a program administered by the Texas Workforce Commission in collaboration with Local Workforce Development Boards, the Texas Department of Criminal Justice (TDCJ), the Windham School District and the Texas Youth Commission (TYC). The project provides a link between education, training, and employment during incarceration with employment, training, and education after release.

While inside the walls, an individual transition plan is developed to identify a career path for the offender and to guide placement decisions. Prior to release, an evaluation is conducted to assess the needs of the offender and assist in the selection and placement in Windham, college, TDCJ and TYC programs. The evaluation process is a multi-step approach that includes information gathering, goal-setting, program placement and offender self-assessment.

After release, TWC Project RIO staff provides ex-offenders with individualized workforce development services including job preparation and job search assistance. RIO participants attend structured job search workshops that focus on basic skills such as completing a work application, preparing a resume and performing in a mock interview. However, the most important aspect of the TWC Project RIO program is ex-offender employment as soon as possible after release.

While Texas has had success reintegrating ex-offenders into the workforce, there are still areas where additional focus and coordination between the project partners can bring about improved performance.

Texas Correctional Industries has a "War Against Recidivism" (WAR) program that provides inmates with work experience in demand occupations, professional certification and licensure as needed, and a record of their training and work activities while incarcerated, but WAR only reaches a small percentage of TDCJ inmates.

H.B. 2837 improves coordination between partner agencies so ex-offenders receive professional certification and licensing along with educational opportunities in an applied vocational context; TYC, TDCJ, and TWC share data seamlessly on ex-offenders and their post-release employment status; and the effectiveness of training services is evaluated and reported annually to the governor and the Legislative Budget Board.

RULEMAKING AUTHORITY

This bill does not expressly grant any additional rulemaking authority to a state officer, institution, or agency.

SECTION BY SECTION ANALYSIS

SECTION 1. Amends Section 19.004(c), Education Code, to require the Windham School District (district) to develop certain educational and vocational training programs.

SECTION 2. Amends Chapter 19, Education Code, by adding Section 19.0041, as follows:

Sec. 19.0041. EVALUATION OF TRAINING SERVICES. (a) Requires the district, to evaluate the effectiveness of training services provided to persons confined or imprisoned in the Texas Department of Criminal Justice (department), to consult with the Legislative Budget Board (LBB) to compile and analyze information for each person who receives the training services. Requires the information to include an evaluation of certain aspects of the training services.

(b) Requires LBB to submit an annual report to the legislature and the governor's office based on data compiled and analyzed under Subsection (a).

SECTION 3. Amends Section 19.011, Education Code, as follows:

Sec. 19.011. COORDINATION WITH OTHER STATE AGENCIES. (a) Requires, in order to achieve the goals stated in Section 19.003, the district with the cooperation of the Health and Human Services Commission, the Texas Workforce Investment Council, the Texas Workforce Commission (TWC), the Texas Economic Development and Tourism Office, and the department to provide persons confined or imprisoned in the department with certain information relating to job training and a tax refund voucher program.

(b) Requires, rather than authorizes, the district to coordinate vocational education and job training programs with a local workforce development board authorized by TWC to ensure that district students are equipped with the skills necessary to compete for current and emerging jobs.

SECTION 4. Amends Sections 306.001(2) and (4), Labor Code, to define "correctional institutions division," rather than "institutional division." Deletes existing text defining "state jail division." Makes a conforming change.

SECTION 5. Amends Section 306.002, Labor Code, to make a conforming change.

SECTION 6. Amends Section 306.005(a), Labor Code, to make a conforming and nonsubstantive change.

SECTION 7. Amends Section 306.007, Labor Code, as follows:

Sec. 306.007. PROVISION OF INFORMATION ON STATE SERVICES FOR EX-OFFENDERS AND EMPLOYERS. (a) Requires, to assist in the reintegration into the labor force of persons formerly sentenced to the correctional institutions division or committed to the Texas Youth Commission (TYC), rather than the state jail division, TWC through Project RIO to provide certain information to those persons and the employers and potential employers of those persons relating to reintegration employment opportunities.

(b) Requires TWC to adopt a memorandum of understanding with certain agencies that establishes the respective responsibilities of TWC and the agencies in providing information described by Subsection (a) to persons formerly sentenced to the institutional division or the state jail division of the department, to employers or potential employers of those persons, and to local workforce development boards. Deletes existing Subsection (c) relating to TWC's obligation to coordinate the development of the memoranda of understanding and preparing a certain annual report.

SECTION 8. Amends Chapter 306, Labor Code, by adding Section 306.008, as follows:

Sec. 306.008. DATA SHARING. (a) Requires TWC, the TYC, and the department, to assist in the reintegration into the labor force of persons formerly sentenced to the correctional institutions division or committed to the Texas Youth Commission, to establish a data interface that, at a minimum, provides to TWC certain information about persons released from a correctional facility who might benefit from post-release Project

RIO services and referral information from the department and the Texas Youth Commission necessary to implement the provisions of post-release employment services.

(b) Requires the data interface established under Subsection (a) to be designed to provide to a person's supervising officer on release information about the person's participation in employment services and entry into the workforce.

(c) Provides that information received from the Texas Youth Commission under this section is confidential and is not subject to disclosure under Chapter 552 (Public Information), Government Code.

SECTION 9. Effective date: September 1, 2005