

BILL ANALYSIS

Senate Research Center

S.B. 578
By: Hinojosa; Rodríguez
Criminal Justice
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Enrolled

AUTHOR'S / SPONSOR'S STATEMENT OF INTENT

In 2014, the Texas Department of Criminal Justice (TDCJ) released an estimated 70,000 individuals. However, approximately 29,000 individuals discharged from prison and state jail do not qualify for TDCJ's Reentry and Integration Division programs. Many of these individuals are in desperate need of housing assistance, employment opportunities, and contact information for organizations that will provide medical and mental health care. Research suggests that the most critical period for someone leaving prison is the period immediately following release.

Many Texas organizations—private, non-profit, local, and faith-based—have compiled locale-specific resource lists that could be made available to incarcerated individuals preparing for their return to society. Access to resources would greatly help incarcerated individuals formulate reentry plans based on available community providers, and it would increase the chances that these individuals will successfully reintegrate into their community and become productive, law-abiding citizens.

S.B. 578 requires TDCJ to identify organizations that provide reentry and reintegration resources guides and to collaborate with those organizations to make those resource guides available to all inmates.

S.B. 578 amends current law relating to providing inmates of the Texas Department of Criminal Justice with information regarding reentry and reintegration resources.

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 Subchapter C, Chapter 501, Government Code, by adding Section 501.0971, as follows:

Sec. 501.0971. PROVISION OF REENTRY AND REINTEGRATION INFORMATION TO INMATES. (a) Requires the Texas Department of Criminal Justice (TDCJ) to identify organizations that provide reentry and reintegration resource guides and to collaborate with those organizations to prepare a resource guide that is to be made available to all inmates. Requires TDCJ to, at a minimum, collaborate with nonprofit entities that specialize in criminal justice issues, faith-based organizations, and organizations that offer pro bono legal services to inmates or are composed of the families and friends of inmates.

(b) Requires TDCJ to make the resource guide available in the Windham School District libraries and in each of the following areas of a correctional facility: peer educator classrooms, chapels, reintegration specialist offices, and any area or classroom that is used by TDCJ for the purpose of providing information about reentry to inmates.

(c) Requires TDCJ to make available a sufficient number of copies of the resource guide to ensure that each inmate is able to access the resource guide in a timely manner.

(d) Requires TDCJ to identify organizations described by Subsection (a) that provide information described by Subsection (e) and to collaborate with those organizations to compile county-specific information packets for inmates. Requires TDCJ to, within the 180-day period preceding the date an inmate will discharge the inmate's sentence or is released on parole, mandatory supervision, or conditional pardon, provide the inmate with a county-specific information packet for the county that the inmate designates as the inmate's intended residence.

(e) Requires that a county-specific packet described by Subsection (d) include, at a minimum, for the applicable county:

(1) contact information, including telephone numbers, e-mail addresses, physical locations, and mailing addresses, as applicable, of:

(A) workforce offices, housing options, places of worship, support groups, peer-to-peer counseling groups, and other relevant organizations or agencies as determined by TDCJ and the collaborating organization;

(B) agencies and organizations that offer emergency assistance, such as food and clothing banks, temporary bus passes, low-cost medical assistance, and overnight and temporary housing; and

(C) agencies and organizations that offer mental health counseling; and

(2) information necessary for the inmate to apply for governmental assistance or benefits, including Medicaid, social security benefits, or nutritional assistance programs under Chapter 33 (Nutritional Assistance Programs), Human Resources Code.

SECTION 2. Effective date: September 1, 2015.