

BILL ANALYSIS

Senate Research Center
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H.B. 918
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Criminal Justice
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Engrossed

AUTHOR'S / SPONSOR'S STATEMENT OF INTENT

H.B. 918 will increase employment among former inmates and decrease recidivism by providing inmates exiting the prison system with the documentation they would need to find a job post-release. This documentation includes an inmate's job training record, a resume, identification card, birth certificate, social security card, and training history.

The national unemployment rate of formerly incarcerated people is estimated to be 27 percent. This is higher than the total unemployment rate in the United States of America during any time period, including the Great Depression. Unemployed ex-convicts are costly to the state and to the economy at large. However, research has shown that ex-convicts who find employment are substantially less likely to re-offend, which carries a variety of benefits to society at-large: reducing crime, decreasing stresses on the police and the criminal justice system, increasing labor force participation, reducing consumption of public benefits, and increasing the wellbeing of the ex-convicts themselves as well as their dependents. Since inmate employment is often stifled by a lack of the documentation required to apply for a job, providing this documentation required by H.B. 918 would remove a substantial barrier to employment.

H.B. 918 is part of the Texas Association of Business's "Jobs and Paychecks Package" to increase labor force participation, especially in key industries such as manufacturing, construction, and transportation.

H.B. 918 amends current law relating to providing discharged or released inmates with certain documents, including documents to assist the inmate in obtaining employment.

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 A, Chapter 501, Government Code, by adding Sections 501.0155 and 501.0166, as follows:

Sec. 501.0155. PROVIDING DISCHARGED OR RELEASED INMATE WITH DOCUMENTATION FOR EMPLOYMENT. Requires the Texas Department of Criminal Justice (TDCJ), when an inmate who is able to work, as determined by TDCJ based on the inmate's age or mental or physical condition, is discharged or released on parole, mandatory supervision, or conditional pardon and the intended residence designated by the inmate is in this state, to provide the inmate with relevant documentation to assist the inmate in obtaining post-release employment, including:

- (1) as applicable, a copy of the inmate's job training record described by Section 497.094 (Job Training Programs) and the inmate's work record described by Section 497.095 (Inmate's Work Record); and
- (2) for an inmate who completed a prerelease program required by a parole panel as a condition of release:

(A) a resume that includes any trade learned by the inmate and the inmate's proficiency at that trade; and

(B) documentation that the inmate has completed a practice job interview.

Sec. 501.0166. PROVIDING DISCHARGED OR RELEASED INMATE WITH BIRTH CERTIFICATE AND SOCIAL SECURITY CARD. (a) Requires TDCJ, in addition to complying with the requirements of Section 501.0165 (State-Issued Identification: Necessary Documentation) regarding a license or personal identification certificate for an inmate being discharged or released on parole, mandatory supervision, or conditional pardon, to:

(1) determine whether the inmate has a:

(A) certified copy of the inmate's birth certificate; and

(B) copy of the inmate's social security card; and

(2) if the inmate does not have a document described by Subdivision (1), submit to the appropriate entity on behalf of the inmate a request for the issuance of the applicable document.

(b) Requires TDCJ to submit a request under Subsection (a)(2) as soon as is practicable to enable TDCJ to provide the inmate with the applicable document when TDCJ discharges or releases the inmate.

(c) Provides that this section does not apply to an inmate who:

(1) is not legally present in the United States; or

(2) was not a resident of this state before the person was placed in the custody of TDCJ.

SECTION 2. Effective date: January 1, 2020.