

BILL ANALYSIS

C.S.H.B. 2837
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Corrections
Committee Report (Substituted)

BACKGROUND AND PURPOSE

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.

Project RIO staff encourages participants to take advantage of educational and vocational services and assist offenders in obtaining documents necessary for employment. Unit or facility staff also provides placement services to give offenders practical work experience in their areas of training.

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. In the larger prison system, an inmate’s career path is often based on the *courses* available rather than the *jobs* available. Inmates are routinely trained for positions that are not available in the region to which the offender is being released, or in which they are legally prohibited from being employed.

Additionally, Project RIO is a voluntary program, meaning that offenders can choose not to participate in training inside the walls, or not to report to Project RIO support staff upon their release. The burden is entirely on the offender to report to a local workforce center for job placement services.

HB 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

It is the committee's opinion that this bill does not expressly grant any additional rulemaking authority to a state officer, department, agency, or institution.

ANALYSIS

SECTION 1. Requires the Windham School District to prioritize vocational training programs that result in certification or licensure and requires the district to ensure that education programs, such as GED and ESL, are integrated with an applied vocational context leading to employment.

SECTION 2. Requires the Windham School District to contract with an outside organization to compile and analyze information for each offender who receives training while incarcerated.

The TDCJ is required to submit an annual report, produced by the organization the district contracted with based on its data compilation and analysis, to the LBB and the governor to evaluate the effectiveness of training services.

SECTION 3. Adds the Texas Workforce Commission, and the Texas Economic Development and Tourism Office to the agencies required to provide inmates information on job training and employment referral services and information on the tax refund voucher program. Requires that the Windham School District coordinate vocational education and job training programs with a local workforce development board authorized by the Texas Workforce Commission.

SECTION 4. Changes the name of the "Institutional division" of TDCJ to the "Correctional institutions division" and deletes the definition of "state jail division"

SECTION 5. Conforming changes to division names.

SECTION 6. Conforming changes to division names.

SECTION 7. Makes a conforming name change to the correctional institutions division, the Texas Economic Development and Tourism Office, the Department of State Health Services, the Health and Human Services Commission; and adds that Project RIO shall provide information to persons formerly sentenced to the Texas Youth Commission. Removes The Texas Department of Economic Development and the Texas Workforce Investment Council from the list of agencies that the Work Force Commission must adopt a memorandum of understanding with. Removes the provision that the Texas Workforce Commission coordinates the development of the memoranda of understanding and prepare an annual report describing the number of ex-offenders in the preceding year receiving services.

SECTION 8. Requires the Texas Workforce Commission, the TYC, and the TDCJ to establish a data interface to assist in the reintegration into the labor force of persons formerly sentenced to the correctional institutions division or the TYC.

The interface must provide the Texas Workforce Commission with information detailing populations released from facilities who might benefit from post release Project RIO services, and also it must provide the commission with referral information from TDCJ and TYC necessary to implement the provision of post-release employment services.

SECTION 9. Effective Date

EFFECTIVE DATE

September 1, 2005

COMPARISON OF ORIGINAL TO SUBSTITUTE

The Substitute is a Legislative Council draft of the original.