

By: Romero, Jr.

H.B. No. 3311

A BILL TO BE ENTITLED

AN ACT

relating to the verification of the veteran status of inmates and prisoners.

BE IT ENACTED BY THE LEGISLATURE OF THE STATE OF TEXAS:

SECTION 1. Section 501.024(b), Government Code, is amended to read as follows:

(b) The department shall:

(1) in consultation with the Texas Veterans Commission, investigate and verify the veteran status of each inmate by using the best available federal data; and

(2) use the data described by Subdivision (1) to assist inmates who are veterans in applying for federal benefits or compensation for which the inmates may be eligible under a program administered by the United States Department of Veterans Affairs, including mailing any related paperwork, application, or other correspondence on behalf of and at no charge to the inmate.

SECTION 2. Section 511.009(a), Government Code, is amended to read as follows:

(a) The commission shall:

(1) adopt reasonable rules and procedures establishing minimum standards for the construction, equipment, maintenance, and operation of county jails;

(2) adopt reasonable rules and procedures establishing minimum standards for the custody, care, and treatment

1 of prisoners;

2 (3) adopt reasonable rules establishing minimum  
3 standards for the number of jail supervisory personnel and for  
4 programs and services to meet the needs of prisoners;

5 (4) adopt reasonable rules and procedures  
6 establishing minimum requirements for programs of rehabilitation,  
7 education, and recreation in county jails;

8 (5) revise, amend, or change rules and procedures if  
9 necessary;

10 (6) provide to local government officials  
11 consultation on and technical assistance for county jails;

12 (7) review and comment on plans for the construction  
13 and major modification or renovation of county jails;

14 (8) require that the sheriff and commissioners of each  
15 county submit to the commission, on a form prescribed by the  
16 commission, an annual report on the conditions in each county jail  
17 within their jurisdiction, including all information necessary to  
18 determine compliance with state law, commission orders, and the  
19 rules adopted under this chapter;

20 (9) review the reports submitted under Subdivision (8)  
21 and require commission employees to inspect county jails regularly  
22 to ensure compliance with state law, commission orders, and rules  
23 and procedures adopted under this chapter;

24 (10) adopt a classification system to assist sheriffs  
25 and judges in determining which defendants are low-risk and  
26 consequently suitable participants in a county jail work release  
27 program under Article [42.034](#), Code of Criminal Procedure;

1           (11) adopt rules relating to requirements for  
2 segregation of classes of inmates and to capacities for county  
3 jails;

4           (12) require that the chief jailer of each municipal  
5 lockup submit to the commission, on a form prescribed by the  
6 commission, an annual report of persons under 17 years of age  
7 securely detained in the lockup, including all information  
8 necessary to determine compliance with state law concerning secure  
9 confinement of children in municipal lockups;

10          (13) at least annually determine whether each county  
11 jail is in compliance with the rules and procedures adopted under  
12 this chapter;

13          (14) require that the sheriff and commissioners court  
14 of each county submit to the commission, on a form prescribed by the  
15 commission, an annual report of persons under 17 years of age  
16 securely detained in the county jail, including all information  
17 necessary to determine compliance with state law concerning secure  
18 confinement of children in county jails;

19          (15) schedule announced and unannounced inspections  
20 of jails under the commission's jurisdiction using the risk  
21 assessment plan established under Section [511.0085](#) to guide the  
22 inspections process;

23          (16) adopt a policy for gathering and distributing to  
24 jails under the commission's jurisdiction information regarding:

25                 (A) common issues concerning jail  
26 administration;

27                 (B) examples of successful strategies for

1 maintaining compliance with state law and the rules, standards, and  
2 procedures of the commission; and

3 (C) solutions to operational challenges for  
4 jails;

5 (17) report to the Texas Correctional Office on  
6 Offenders with Medical or Mental Impairments on a jail's compliance  
7 with Article 16.22, Code of Criminal Procedure;

8 (18) adopt reasonable rules and procedures  
9 establishing minimum requirements for jails to:

10 (A) determine if a prisoner is pregnant; and

11 (B) ensure that the jail's health services plan  
12 addresses medical and mental health care, including nutritional  
13 requirements, and any special housing or work assignment needs for  
14 persons who are confined in the jail and are known or determined to  
15 be pregnant;

16 (19) provide guidelines to sheriffs regarding  
17 contracts between a sheriff and another entity for the provision of  
18 food services to or the operation of a commissary in a jail under  
19 the commission's jurisdiction, including specific provisions  
20 regarding conflicts of interest and avoiding the appearance of  
21 impropriety;

22 (20) adopt reasonable rules and procedures  
23 establishing minimum standards for prisoner visitation that  
24 provide each prisoner at a county jail with a minimum of two  
25 in-person, noncontact visitation periods per week of at least 20  
26 minutes duration each;

27 (21) require the sheriff of each county to:

1 (A) investigate and verify the veteran status of  
2 each prisoner during the intake process by using data made  
3 available from the Veterans Reentry Search Service (VRSS) operated  
4 by the United States Department of Veterans Affairs or a similar  
5 service; and

6 (B) use the data described by Paragraph (A) to  
7 assist prisoners who are veterans in applying for federal benefits  
8 or compensation for which the prisoners may be eligible under a  
9 program administered by the United States Department of Veterans  
10 Affairs, including mailing any related paperwork, application, or  
11 other correspondence on behalf of and at no charge to the prisoner;

12 (22) adopt reasonable rules and procedures regarding  
13 visitation of a prisoner at a county jail by a guardian, as defined  
14 by Section 1002.012, Estates Code, that:

15 (A) allow visitation by a guardian to the same  
16 extent as the prisoner's next of kin, including placing the  
17 guardian on the prisoner's approved visitors list on the guardian's  
18 request and providing the guardian access to the prisoner during a  
19 facility's standard visitation hours if the prisoner is otherwise  
20 eligible to receive visitors; and

21 (B) require the guardian to provide the sheriff  
22 with letters of guardianship issued as provided by Section  
23 1106.001, Estates Code, before being allowed to visit the prisoner;  
24 and

25 (23) adopt reasonable rules and procedures to ensure  
26 the safety of prisoners, including rules and procedures that  
27 require a county jail to:

1                   (A) give prisoners the ability to access a mental  
2 health professional at the jail through a telemental health service  
3 24 hours a day;

4                   (B) give prisoners the ability to access a health  
5 professional at the jail or through a telehealth service 24 hours a  
6 day or, if a health professional is unavailable at the jail or  
7 through a telehealth service, provide for a prisoner to be  
8 transported to access a health professional; and

9                   (C) if funding is available under Section  
10 [511.019](#), install automated electronic sensors or cameras to ensure  
11 accurate and timely in-person checks of cells or groups of cells  
12 confining at-risk individuals.

13           SECTION 3. This Act takes effect September 1, 2019.