By: Reynolds  

H.C.R. No. 51

CONCURRENT RESOLUTION

WHEREAS, In 2018, the discovery of an unmarked burial ground at the former Imperial State Prison Farm site in Sugar Land drew national attention to an abhorrent chapter in history; and

WHEREAS, Archeologists at the site found the skeletal remains of 95 victims of the convict leasing system, which was used after the Civil War to replicate the oppression that existed under slavery; although the 13th Amendment to the U.S. Constitution prohibited involuntary servitude, it created an exemption for people convicted of crimes; Southern states took advantage by enacting "Black Codes," laws that applied only to African Americans, who could be prosecuted criminally for such offenses as loitering, breaking curfew, or not carrying proof of employment; and

WHEREAS, Prisoners of the state were leased as cheap labor to private railways, mines, and agricultural operations, including the sugar plantations along the Brazos River; while receiving no pay, convicts often endured conditions even more brutal than slavery, given that contractors had no financial interest in their well-being; more than 3,500 Texas prisoners died between 1866 and 1912, when the legislature outlawed convict leasing; and

WHEREAS, While the state and employers profited, the families and communities of victims suffered damage that spanned generations; a full understanding of the convict leasing system and its aftereffects is vital to addressing issues that continue to
plague society today, including mass incarceration, convict labor, prison privatization, and entrenched poverty; now, therefore, be it
RESOLVED, That the 86th Legislature of the State of Texas hereby request the lieutenant governor and the speaker of the house of representatives to create a joint interim committee to study the legacy of convict leasing in Texas; and, be it further
RESOLVED, That the committee examine the treatment of victims of the convict leasing system, the extent to which the State of Texas supported the system, and the lingering negative effects of the system; and, be it further
RESOLVED, That the committee determine appropriate ways to educate the general public about the convict leasing system; and, be it further
RESOLVED, That the committee submit a full report, including findings and recommendations, to the 87th Texas Legislature in January 2021; and, be it further
RESOLVED, That the committee's proceedings and operations be governed by such general rules and policies for interim committees as the 86th Texas Legislature may adopt.