

PUBLIC COMMENTS

HB 787

HOUSE COMMITTEE ON CORRECTIONS

Hearing Date: March 17, 2021 8:00 AM

Karen Page, Ms.

Self Retired

San Angelo, TX

My name is Karen Page,. I'm writing in FAVOR of HB 787 by Rep. Allen and am representing myself. This bill would prohibit a Judge from telling myself or my loved one that we can't organize around criminal justice issues with other people on parole. We may want to mentor young men that have been in trouble to help them have a better life. I might want to volunteer or speak at a meeting in which there will be other people on parole. This bill would let me do that without violating my parole. People listen to those that have walked in their shoes, they know they are being honest and trying to help. I ask that you all support this bill. Thank you for your service to the State of Texas.

Lauren Byrd-moreno

Self, advocate

Silsbee, TX

This bill could help many individuals who are coming back into their communities and are trying to get back on their feet. Odds are that someone who is also formerly incarcerated and on parole may be of assistance, support and offer guidance on how to reintegrate successfully. Often times alcoholism and substance abuse have a direct correlation with incarceration, probation and parole so would even disqualify people who are on supervision from going to AA or NA because there are others there in similar situations. I fully support this bill

Marilyn Hartman

Member and Advocate, National Alliance on Mental Illness (NAMI) Central Texas

Austin, TX

I support this bill. Peer support helps people continue on a better path, helping to prevent re-incarceration.

Reginald Smith

Building Promise USA

Austin, TX

Building Promise USA a Texas Peer Led Reentry Organization supports this bill.

Miesha Jones

TAJ

Houston, TX

I support this.

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Beth Bryant
myself
Georgetown, TX

Please a yes vote - a very good bill.

Carl Hunter, Senior Policy Advisor
Recovery Coalition of Texas (RCT)
Austin, TX

I am a member of the recovery community. Many of those in recovery or beginning their recovery journey are on probation or under supervision. There are many community-based recovery support services that are not available accessible because of this prohibition.

Terra Tucker
Alliance for Safety and Justice
Austin, TX

Alliance for Safety and Justice is in support of this bill.

Taylor Stensrud
Texas Recovery Advocacy Project
Dallas, TX

We must stop denying individuals on probation from the positive mentorship of others who have been through, or are going through, similar experiences.

Laura Stearne, Ms
Self, LPC
El Paso, TX

Should not prohibit to allow for interactions with support groups

Slade Skaggs, Owner of Recovery Centered Living / Peer Recovery Support Specialist
Recovery Centered Living / Self
Austin, TX

I can say without a doubt that this is old policy and outdated, that is no longer effective for persons on probation. Peers need peers in the same situation to see possibility, to see they are not alone, to see they are not a mistake and that they are amongst other humans that have made mistakes to and that it is a human experience not moral deficiency!

People that are experiencing the same type of hurdles that another is can support one another by being around one another we were not meant to do things alone it goes against human nature. This is essential for peers to hold each other up encourage one another and have a peer-led community with self-directed choices. Trying to limit someone's freedom to be around other people who have experienced the same things they have, prevents another person from really truly seeing that not only hope is possible but there is solution for the situation that they are in. Peerness is so essential for a person to continue to grow on their path, the shame and isolation already caused by the barrier's of outdated policy have to long perpetuated in helath choices and self harm fueled by stigma due to the shadow cast by the label and limitations of being a person in the justice system.

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The definition of justice is the use of power as appointed by law, honor or standards to support fair treatment and due reward. Fair treatment I believe extends the idea and thought of being treated humanely and not as an outcast or morally deficient person that is not capable of being around specific people. Due reward again extends the idea of a person is entitled to and deserving of being faulted with the opportunity of recourse without barriers like not having to live from a fear based judgement or badge of shame put upon them from past mistakes of past actions.

I invite anyone reading this to consider the idea of Community, Peer Recovery Support, and to know I am writing this as a person with lived experience that not only checked the boxes that my judge gave me to fulfill for my probation but went beyond just the requirements and rode up to a new way of life driven by being of service to my fellow peers struggling with Substance Use Disorders as well as the struggle of the cycle so many of us fall into with the outdated justice system that need a fresh restart to address the issues on why people are ending up on probation in the first place, what was their history that led them to be there, these are the questions that are missing in our outdated justice system, punishment is misplaced in to people that would be better off being offered true help and support, people do not grow from shame they regress, people thrive in new experience, I ask the people can't we provide a new experience?
Do we not deserve Due Reward and the justice of a new experience?

Ben Bass

El Paso Alliance, Inc.

El Paso, TX

People on supervision must have peer support, including support from others under supervision

Jay Burns

Communities for Recovery

Austin, TX

Alienation is a driver of abusive behaviors. From an outside perspective the desire to alienate those deemed to be abusive to themselves or others may seem like a necessary and logical course of action but in fact can often times perpetuate a vicious cycle where, from the inside perspective, there is nowhere to go but down so why even try.

Positive reinforcement for positive life change can be impossible to come by from the ladder POV. Positive support and encouragement is not something so easily accepted when handed down from above as everything seems on top of you, and it is not so easily trusted. However, a community of like minded individuals who find strength in supporting one another through difficult circumstances in a non judgmental way, and with first hand shared experience, can be a powerful way to fuel positive life growth and change. Trust is like a glue that can hold things together when things get shaky and trust is more easily fostered between people who share common experiences and demonstrate the truth and availability of potential and change as it is actualized.

It could only be an incredibly difficult and arduous task to enact legislations to try to control and limit an individual's potential to do harm but, depending on how the axe falls, we may also be limiting their potential itself; and the ability to grow and change can be cut along with that.

Linda Mikolajek, Ms.

NAMI central Texas

Austin, TX

I am writing to ask you to support HB 787. I have a son who has a serious mental illness and has been circulating through hospitals and the forensic system. Since February 2019 until the present time, he has spent more time in a hospital or jail than he has outside. People like my son who have serious mental illnesses are more likely to return to custody due to technical parole or

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probation violations, primarily because they don't understand the system and they may fail to comply with community-based mental health treatment. Peer support has been shown to increase the use of community-based mental health and substance use services. When individuals have better support exiting a jail or prison and can get appropriate housing, employment and he said she'll documentations they are more likely to be successful. Peer support is a lesser expensive way to assist individuals with serious mental illness and that is why I am asking you to support HB 787.

NAMI Central Texas at NAMI Texas strongly support this bill. I am on the advocacy committee of nonessential Texas and if I can help you with any information or answer your questions please contact me.

Linda Mikolajek
miko4@msn.com

Jeff Mikolajek, Mr.
NAMI Central Texas
Austin, TX

I wish you to support this bill , HB 787. This bill will support my son who has been in Austin state hospital twice in the last two years. This bill will help him once released to get support so that he will not be re-arrested and put back into ash for further treatment.

As a mental health advocate, I will be glad to assist you in answering any questions you might have. I appreciate your help in improving our mental health system in our state.

Jeff Mikolajek
Mikola4@outlook.com
832-605-5147

Lisa Stone
Texas Recovery Advocacy Project
Houston, TX

I urge support of HB 787 because it will remove the prohibition stopping individuals on probation from interacting with others on supervision.

These individuals will then be able to attend support groups, outside community activities, transitional housing, and much more without fear of violation or repercussions.

We want to encourage individuals on probation to take advantage of the positive mentorship of others who have been through, or are going through, similar experiences.

This bill will help remove a barrier that tends to increase recidivism.

Please support HB 787 to support folks on probation, so they are more likely to avoid further trouble.

Jennifer Pumphrey, Activist/Criminal Justice Advocate/ Friend to all who do not hate.
3301 Dalton St
Austin, TX

This would WIDELY enrich people who're trying to get through the day upon reentry. No one can know the struggles &the forms of assistance in getting back on their feet like an ex convict. It's like AA &having a sponsor. Someone who's been there, someone who knows the pain &hardships people go thru upon reentry &can help assist them thru this maze of paper work and different organizations. Depending on the person's personal issues, having someone who has walked in those shoes to help guide &mentor even, this individual could be paramount to the individuals mental state &staying out of trouble & if there were drug issues, help them stay clean.

I was incarcerated for almost two years for a crime I didn't commit. Upon reentry I felt so alone &as if I didn't belong or wasn't good enough to spend time with others. Even though I was innocent of those charges, the way you are treated while incarcerated is at the least traumatic. Treated like an animal &harassed, called names, physically, mentally& sexually abused &the list goes on. Having someone whose been incarcerated to help guide a new reentry could be the difference between life & death.

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Considering the US incarcerates more of its citizens than any other country in the world, that leaves a lot of people out of reach of the new entry, which can mean friends, family & loved ones. This not only restricts this person's support system but it also further keeps family & friends out of this person's life, it also keeps them from having a chance at getting all the help they possibly can & in being in that position, you definitely need all the help you can get. They've paid most of their debt to society & have been released by a group of certified individuals saying they are no longer a threat to society, if we want to keep it that way, they NEED all the help they can get. No one knows better than someone who's had to walk thru those same struggles & make positive, healthy, productive decisions to stay out of the CJ System & become a law abiding, tax paying, stable member of society.

These individuals have already paid & experience more than you could imagine, keeping others who've had legal issues in the past out of their lives only further incompasotating this individual of life saving knowledge & possibly their only support system. Upon release back into society, these individuals should be able to communicate with others who've had the same experience & know how it feels to be in that place, had I had someone like this to help me, I would not have spent my first three months out hiding in my apartment because I didn't feel like I was good enough to be in society after the verbal abuse and humiliation you endure while incarcerated. I needed help by someone who'd been there before, but because of this law I couldn't talk to anyone who knew how it felt to walk those streets alone, with nothing, feeling like nothing, starting over with nothing. Being treated like you are nothing.

Eric Kunish, Advocacy Chair
National Alliance on Mental Illness
Austin, TX

I support this bill.

Jennifer Priddy, Program Director
Texas Recovery Advocacy Project
Midland, TX

Remove the prohibition of individuals on probation from interacting with others on supervision. This will allow individuals to attend support groups, outside community activities, transitional housing, and much more without fear of violation or repercussions. We must stop denying individuals on probation from the positive mentorship of others who have been through, or are going through, similar experiences. Bring down the barriers to recidivism.

Garrett Stewart
Thriving United
Midland, TX

I am currently on 4 felony probations [deferred adjudication]. And I believe it could have been beneficial if a peer who was walking down the path I was, just a little ahead of me, would have been able to walk me thru some things I had to guess at. For instance, getting my driver's license again or applying for Food Stamps, etc. I think giving back helps others become more free. I hope this bill becomes a law.

Pat Brown, Executive Director
Thriving United
Midland, TX

It is important for people in recovery to be able to attend mutual support meetings. It is important to have heart to heart connections in recovery. It is important for the people with recovery to show new people what recovery looks like. It is important for new people to see recovery.

Annette Price

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Grassroots Leadership

Austin, TX

I support this bill

Brenda B

Self

Austin, TX

Please remove the prohibition of individuals on probation from interacting with others on supervision.

David Johnson

Grassroots Leadership

Austin, TX

This is an amazing bill.

Becky Morris

Self

San Angelo, TX

Request the Committee to give favorable consideration to HB787. As an advocate for criminal justice reform, there are many organizations that benefit from the expertise of those previously incarcerated. It can also benefit the previously incarcerated by allowing them to learn and assist in making changes. It can give them a purpose.

Lauren Johnson

ACLU

Austin, TX

As a formerly incarcerated person who conducts trainings and pro-social events with other formerly incarcerated people, as well as in recognizing that peer to peer mentorship is a key to personal transformation as evidenced by the growing field in mental health, recovery, and reentry, this bill is a common sense step to clearly allow association for people who are released. I am in support of this bill. Thank you to Dr. Allen for filing this key legislation.

Jose Flores

self

Lockhart, TX

I support this bill.

Lovinah Igbani

Self

Houston, TX

I am in support of this bill passing. Ex offenders living with or engaging with one another does not increase their chances of recidivism. They can offer peer support to one another as often, the ex offender feels isolated & lacks connection with others.

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Perry Covington, Housing Navigator
Texas Recovery Advocacy Project
Abilene, TX

Barriers that deny individuals on probation from get the support in the community they need must come down. By keeping these restrictions we only push them back to reincarceration.

Chantel Pridgon-Landry, Mrs.
Texas Advocates for Justice
Pflugerville, TX

Individuals on supervision need the support and mentorship of others who are successfully navigating probation/parole, and yet probation denies this to people on supervision. Please support this bill. Thank you

Jennifer Russell
Self
Houston, TX

I support HB 787

Curtis Brown
Self
Houston, TX

I support HB 787