

BILL ANALYSIS

C.S.H.B. 967
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Corrections
Committee Report (Substituted)

BACKGROUND AND PURPOSE

According to the Texas Department of Criminal Justice (TDCJ), as of April 2023, over 9,700 women were incarcerated in TDCJ. Current accessibility to existing programming in TDCJ, including state jail facilities, is extremely limited, leaving massive gaps in service for broad groups of women who are incarcerated. The Texas Women's Justice Coalition reports there is a limited number of spaces in newer programs and expansion of services is urgently needed. Programs such as EWOP (Empowering Women Out of Prison) and STRIVE (Strength Through Restoration, Independence, Vision and Empowerment) are critical for women's successful reentry but they are only offered at two women's units. C.S.H.B. 967 seeks to ensure more women have access to in-prison rehabilitative programs and the same opportunities as men to take master's level education courses. In turn, women can be strong workforce candidates on reentry, which will help them support their families and will reduce the likelihood of re-offending.

CRIMINAL JUSTICE IMPACT

It is the committee's opinion that this bill does not expressly create a criminal offense, increase the punishment for an existing criminal offense or category of offenses, or change the eligibility of a person for community supervision, parole, or mandatory supervision.

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

C.S.H.B. 967 amends the Government Code to include parenting classes among the programs for which the Texas Department of Criminal Justice (TDCJ) is required to develop and implement policies that increase and promote a female inmate's access to programs and to specify that the programs for which TDCJ must develop and implement these policies include programs offered to female defendants confined in state jail felony facilities. The bill requires TDCJ to develop and implement policies that:

- require each facility to make programs for female inmates available and accessible not later than the 45th day after the date the inmate arrives at the facility;
- ensure female inmates have access to program opportunities, including master's level education courses, that are equitable to the program opportunities that are provided to male inmates; and
- ensure that vocational programs and any related certifications are substantively relevant to current workforce demands and opportunities.

The bill requires TDCJ to develop and implement the policies necessary to implement the bill's provisions as soon as practicable after the bill's effective date.

EFFECTIVE DATE

September 1, 2023.

COMPARISON OF INTRODUCED AND SUBSTITUTE

While C.S.H.B. 967 may differ from the introduced in minor or nonsubstantive ways, the following summarizes the substantial differences between the introduced and committee substitute versions of the bill.

Whereas the introduced required the TDCJ policies to ensure female inmates have access to the same program opportunities that are available to male inmates, the substitute requires the policies to ensure that female inmates have access to program opportunities that are equitable to the program opportunities provided to male inmates. The substitute includes among the policies TDCJ is required to develop and implement policies that ensure that vocational programs and any related certifications are substantively relevant to current workforce demands and opportunities, which was absent from the introduced.