

**HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES
COMPILATION OF PUBLIC COMMENTS**

Submitted to the Committee on S/C on Juvenile Justice
For Hearing Date: Monday, April 7, 2025 8:00 AM
Compiled on: April 7, 2025 12:51 PM

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COMMENTS FOR HB 3360 by Cook

Shannon Epner
Big Thought
Dallas, TX

My name is Shannon Epner, & I am the Director, Impact & Advocacy at Big Thought, a Dallas-based nonprofit committed to closing the opportunity gap for youth through creativity, education, & community engagement. Our mission is grounded in the belief that all young people deserve access to learning environments that foster their agency, empathy, & achievement. I am submitting testimony to respectfully oppose House Bill 3360. While we all share the goal of ensuring public safety & accountability, this bill takes a troubling step backward by expanding punitive measures for youth in ways which limit their ability to grow, learn from their mistakes, & successfully reintegrate into our communities.

HB 3360 proposes sweeping changes to the Texas Family Code & Code of Criminal Procedure, specifically targeting youth who commit offenses while in custody of TJJD. One of the most alarming provisions is the new Article 42A.061, which eliminates eligibility for community supervision for certain offenses committed by youth in TJJD custody or placement. This effectively blocks rehabilitative alternatives for youth who may have committed offenses during periods of extreme stress or trauma. By removing the possibility of community supervision, including deferred adjudication, we are denying these youth the tools & resources proven to reduce recidivism.

Another concerning aspect is the expanded discretion given to courts under Section 54.05 of the Family Code, allowing youth probation violations that occur after age 18 to trigger transfer to the adult criminal system. This sets a dangerous precedent. A young person who was adjudicated at 16 but remains under supervision past their 18th birthday could be transferred to the TDCJ based on technical violations or minor infractions. Adult prisons are not equipped to meet the needs of young people. This kind of transfer can derail the critical transitional years of emerging adulthood, exacerbating harm & undermining public safety in the long run.

At Big Thought, we have spent decades working alongside youth in marginalized communities, many of whom are justice impacted. We know from experience & research that punitive approaches are not the answer. What works is trauma-informed care, restorative justice practices, & access to community-based support.

Instead of funneling more youth into the adult system or lengthening their involvement with TJJD, we urge the legislature to invest in alternatives that support youth transformation. That includes increasing funding for community-based programs, expanding diversion efforts, & supporting nonprofits that keep kids engaged in positive pathways.

Texas leads with vision & compassion. HB 3360 does not reflect those values. It undermines rehabilitation, reduces judicial discretion in favor of automatic penalties, & erodes the foundational belief that young people can change. On behalf of Big Thought & the youth & families we serve, I urge you to vote no on HB 3360. Thank you

Araceli Garcia
Self - Public Defender
San Antonio, TX

Members of the Committee,

I am writing to respectfully ask you to oppose HB 3360. I work as a public defender in primarily Atascosa, Frio and Karnes counties, just south of San Antonio, but my testimony reflects only my own opinions, not those of my employer.

As a public defender, I often work with juvenile clients, and I have witnessed firsthand how traumatic going through the juvenile law system is for children. While I understand that children can, and sometimes do, cause harm in their communities, I implore the committee to focus on expanding paths for rehabilitation, rather than cementing these kids as "criminals" and "habitual offenders."

Many children commit new offenses because they are often released right back into the same difficult situations that led them to commit an offense in the first place. Every single one of my clients comes from a family experiencing poverty, most of them are diagnosed with serious mental health issues as part of the adjudicatory process, and very little programming exists to help a child get back on the right path once they've been adjudicated. By changing the definition of habitual felony conduct from a child needing two previous adjudications to only needing one previous adjudication, we are cutting their options for rehabilitation at the knees, and condemning them, and our state tax payers, to a life of institutionalization.

That is to say nothing of the disproportionate impact this law would have on poor children, children of color, and children from rural areas, such as where I practice, who often have far less access to substantive programming and resources.

I would be happy to discuss this issue further with any committee member who has any questions or concerns.

Thank you,

Araceli Garcia, J.D.

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Rose M. Gomez, Chief Juvenile Probation Officer
Cameron County Juvenile Justice Department
San Benito, TX

Dear Chairman Cook and Committee Members, Thank you and your Juvenile Justice Committee members for our time and commitment in addressing juvenile justice matters. My name is Rose M. Gomez and I'm the Chief Juvenile Probation Officer for the Cameron County Juvenile Justice Department. I am respectfully submitting MY SUPPORT to HB 3360 relating to the protection and detention of a juvenile who engages in delinquent conduct or commits a felony offense while committed to the custody of the Texas Juvenile Justice Department; changing the eligibility for community supervision; redefining habitual felony conduct. to juvenile justice proceedings and to the treatment of children detained in facilities. Cameron County operates both a detention center and two post residential programs for males and females. The proposed bill addresses serious and violent offenders that will help State and County run facilities ensure the safety of residents and staff. Even though we implement education, rehabilitative programs, mental health services and TBRI (Trust Based Relational Intervention) efforts, we're still challenged with some high needs youth who don't respond to our interventions and de-escalation efforts. Our staff struggles with assaultive behavior towards other residents and/or our staff. Consequently, it negatively impacts on the safety of residents and staff.

HB 3360 proposes accountability and consequences to serious misbehaviors. The multiple strategies and options offered in this bill will send a strong message to residents as well support the juvenile justice field.

Kyle Dobbs

Fort Bend Juvenile Probation Department

Richmond, TX

Case Study XG

Juvenile XG was brought to the Fort Bend County Juvenile Detention Center (FBCJDC) on January 4, 2023 for the offense of Burglary of a Building. Prior to his detainment, XG had previous referrals for Assault Public Servant, Criminal Mischief, and Assault Family Violence. Juvenile XG also had two pending counts out of San Antonio for Assault Public Servant for allegedly punching a female nurse and hospital staff. Juvenile XG spent 154 days in the FBCJDC. During his time at the FBCJDC, he accumulated thirty-nine disciplinary reports, seventeen of those were for assaultive and violent behavior. His assaultive behavior ultimately resulted in nine new felony Assault Public Servant cases and one new Assault Causing Bodily Injury case. Juvenile XG could have received additional Assault Public Servant charges because during the incident on April 27, 2023, he assaulted five different staff. The District Attorney decided not to file cases on all of the assaults as they felt their case was strong based on all the previous assaults and there wasn't a statutory mechanism to enhance punishment other than an indeterminate commitment to TJJD for Assault of a Public Servant. It should be noted, all of Juvenile XG's assaults usually included, spitting, punching, biting or kicking staff. Do to his size and strength it always took four to six staff to safely gain control of the juvenile.

On May 25, 2023 XG was indeterminately committed to TJJD, XG has continued his disruptive behavior since his commitment to TJJD.

On July 24, 2023, he was arrested for Assault Public Servant and on January 31, 2024 he was released from jail back to the TJJD Evins Facility on 2 years Adult Probation. On February 13, 2024, he was arrested for Harassment Public Servant and Assault Public Servant and on September 4, 2024 he was released from jail back to the TJJD Evins Facility on 2 years deferred adjudication. On February 12, 2025, he was arrested for Harassment Public Servant (x4) and Assault Public Servant, where he currently remains in County Jail. The case of XG is a prime example of some of the aggressive and violent youth Juvenile Detention Centers and TJJD facilities are dealing with across the state of Texas. TJJD data indicates that violence and assaults against staff have continued to be a serious problem. Due to this we support HB-3360 and SB-1727 as they offer multiple strategies and options to prosecutors, when necessary, to effectively deter and prosecute injurious, dangerous and violent behavior when it occurs in Juvenile Detention Centers or TJJD Facilities. Several sections allow for determinate sentencing options and possible transfer to TDCJ if necessary, which in turn will make Texas Juvenile Detention Centers and TJJD facilities safer for other residents/staff and create an environment where the youth desiring and needing intensive treatment will have a safe and secure environment to do so. For more information please see email sent on 4/6/25.

William Carter

Lubbock County Juvenile Justice Center

Lubbock, TX

Good morning committee,

HB 3360 will reinforce the point that violent behavior towards staff in a juvenile correctional setting will not be tolerated and I fully support this bill. During my testimony on the senate companion bill I referred to this bill as a "victim's rights bill" and referenced a incident in Lubbock County's detention center. On Friday April 4, 2025, 3 youth plotted and intentionally assaulted another juvenile as a diversion so 2 additional juveniles could assault a staff. This staff member received multiple injuries before additional staff arrived to assist. 2 other staff were also injured. These young offenders were not provoked in any way as some advocates would have you believe. They schemed prior to the assault and planned it out to be able to maximize injuries to the staff (all heard on audio from our cameras when investigating).

1 young offender is a TJJD Commitment who is going to the intake unit Tuesday 4/8/25.

1 young offender was pending court to be placed into a diversionary program in the community. We will now commit him to TJJD

1 young offender was just committed to TJJD and is on the wait list.

The increased violent behavior seen in the young offenders coming into our facilities in the past few years cannot be tolerated. Young offenders experience violent behavior in their own communities which leads to law enforcement contact. We must protect our employees. They are not just a statistic. They walk and talk just like you and I and they DON'T deserve to be assaulted.

Glen Watson, CJPO
Galveston County Juvenile Justice Department
Dickinson, TX

I submit the following testimony in support of HB 3360 filed by Rep. Cook.

Currently, there are unintended and perverse incentives for a juvenile respondent who is 17-years-of-age or older to commit felony offenses during their commitment to the Texas Juvenile Justice Department (TJJD). Their subsequent adult arrest results in their release from juvenile custody, effectively allowing them to avoid the lawful disposition assigned by a Juvenile Court Judge. These offenses often involve violence against facility staff or other juvenile residents. Juvenile Correctional Officers, Juvenile Supervision Officers, and other facility staff are public servants who are worthy of protection while they're working to provide for the protection of the public and public safety. Similarly, juvenile respondents committed to TJJD should not be subjected to violent felony offenses at the hands of adult age peers as a means for them to circumvent the juvenile justice system. House Bill 3360 would create multiple strategies to hold these offenders accountable for habitual felony conduct when assigned to the custody of TJJD. I would encourage you to support HB 3360 as a means of providing natural and logical consequences for habitual felony conduct by juveniles who have been committed to TJJD.

I currently have the privilege of serving as the Chief Juvenile Probation officer for Galveston County, where I have worked as a dedicated public servant for more than 33 years. Thank you for considering my testimony on HB 3360.
