

# **TEXAS DEPARTMENT OF CRIMINAL JUSTICE**

## **Biennial Reentry and Reintegration Services Report**



**Prepared By**

**Texas Department of Criminal Justice  
Reentry and Integration Division**

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## Introduction

This report contains an evaluation of data and a summary of activities completed since September 2014 for the Reentry and Integration Division of the Texas Department of Criminal Justice (TDCJ). As demonstrated throughout this report, the Reentry and Integration Division has continued to grow and adopt practices which ensure effective service delivery for offenders returning to the community following incarceration. However, it should be noted that many other reentry-related programs administered by other divisions within the TDCJ and the Windham School District also contribute to reduced recidivism. While this report provides an overview of particular accomplishments and enhancements relative to reentry, the division has multiple functions which contribute to successful reentry and are delineated in other reports, to include the yearly report on reentry and parole referral required by Government Code 501.103 as well as the biennial report submitted by the Texas Correctional Office on Offenders with Medical or Mental Impairments (TCOOMMI) in January of odd numbered years in accordance with Health and Safety Code 614.009.

During the 84th Legislature state policymakers continued to demonstrate commitment to enhancing both state and local level reentry practices. Policy initiatives enhanced the development of a comprehensive reentry process designed to eliminate reentry barriers and achieve the goals of increased public safety and reduced recidivism. Measures taken by the Legislature enabled the TDCJ to further implement evidence based practices to assess criminogenic risk and needs, and apply that information to develop effective individualized plans for return to the community. As a result, there were numerous accomplishments, including:

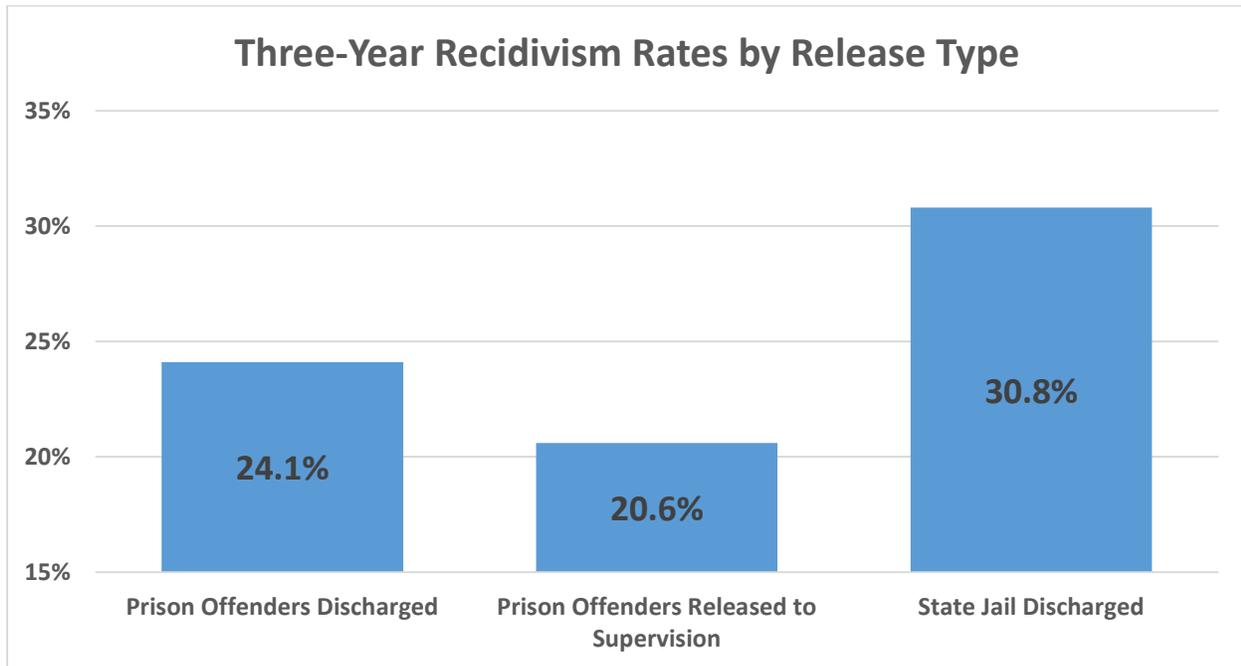
- Continued engagement with the Reentry Task Force;
- Full implementation of the automated Texas Risk Assessment System as well as certification of trainers and end users in use of the assessment tool;
- An addition of 50 reentry transition coordinator positions;
- Expansion of the Post Release Community Reentry Program;
- Development and implementation of a Special Needs Reentry Program to supplement the existing continuity-of-care program;
- Improved processes to increase the number of offenders approved for a Texas ID;
- Automation to better identify eligible offenders for all phases of the Reentry Program;
- Improved tracking and security accountability related to offender identification documents;

- Distribution of the Reentry Resource Guide to TDCJ units to allow for offender access to the resource information pre-release as well as the provision of county specific resource packets to offenders;
- Enhanced veterans reentry services; and
- Facilitated collaboration amongst various TDCJ divisions and the Windham School District to improve post-release offender employment opportunities

These implementation activities, along with other initiatives, are discussed in detail throughout the remainder of this report.

### Recidivism

The ultimate goal of the TDCJ’s reentry program is reduced recidivism. Recidivism rates for the TDCJ offender population continue to be among the lowest in the country with the current overall recidivism rate at 21.4%. The chart below notes a breakdown of recidivism rates by release type. Three year recidivism rates for participants in the Reentry and Integration Division’s new three phase program will be provided in future reports.



Source: Legislative Budget Board, "Statewide Criminal Justice Recidivism and Revocation Rates" January 2015

## Offender Demographics

Throughout Texas, over a million offenders are processed in local jails each year, many of whom transition to the TDCJ supervision. As of June 30, 2016 a combined total of approximately 612,025 offenders were under supervision of the TDCJ. This population includes individuals on probation, in prison, and on parole supervision:

- 375,592 on misdemeanor or felony probation;
- 146,969 incarcerated in the TDCJ facilities;
- 2,465 in an Intermediate Sanction Facility; and
- 86,999 on parole supervision

In considering the demographics of the offender population, it is important to also consider those impacted beyond each individual offender. The offender population represents families, communities, and victims from every segment of the state's demographics who must also be served in order for reentry initiatives to realize success. Thus, those affected demographics go far beyond persons under the TDCJ supervision.

While the numbers alone are staggering, the challenge is magnified by the sizeable geographical area within the state of Texas. It is with those challenges in mind that the continued engagement by TDCJ with state and local partners, as well as the development and implementation of internal initiatives, provides significant momentum toward a seamless system where all components work in tandem to achieve the ultimate goal of reduced recidivism.

## Reentry Task Force Membership

The statewide Reentry Task Force continues to provide a conduit for state and local stakeholders to address reentry practices and provide recommendations for continued enhancement of reentry services across the state. Considering the size of the state and the volume of citizens involved in the criminal justice system, the Reentry Task Force maintained a membership of 29 individuals representing a cross-section of Texas agencies, organizations, and communities:

|  |  |
|--|--|
| Texas Juvenile Justice Department                    | Texas District and County Attorneys Association    |
| Texas Workforce Commission                           | Texas Conference of Urban Counties                 |
| Texas Department of Public Safety                    | Criminal Justice Coordinator, Urban County         |
| Texas Department of Housing and Community Affairs    | Reentry Coordinator, Urban County                  |
| TCOOMMI Advisory Committee                           | Urban County Representative                        |
| Health and Human Services Commission                 | Urban County Commissioner                          |
| Texas Judicial Council                               | Rural County Judge                                 |
| Texas Board of Pardons and Paroles                   | Rural County Commissioner                          |
| Windham School District                              | Texas Inmate Family Association                    |
| Texas Commission on Jail Standards                   | Texas Criminal Justice Coalition                   |
| Department of State Health Services                  | Texas Department of Family and Protective Services |
| Texas Court of Criminal Appeals                      | Office of Court Administration                     |
| County Judges and Commissioners Association of Texas | Texas Department of Criminal Justice               |
| Sheriff's Association of Texas                       | Texas Veterans Commission                          |
|  | Faith-Based Volunteer                              |

## Reentry Task Force Working Groups

The Reentry Task Force maintains working groups to address specific barriers to successful reentry. Each group is tasked with developing findings and recommendations to address all gaps and barriers identified. Working groups include:

- Community Reentry Working Group: goals include identifying current support program or initiatives and successful reentry practices in operation within Texas communities.
- Housing Working Group: goals include identifying existing housing initiatives that provide services to the formerly incarcerated as well as model housing initiatives or efforts currently in operation in Texas communities.
- Employment Working Group: goals include identifying strategies to eliminate barriers to employment in a post release environment as well as coordination of resources, job training and assistance.
- Family and Faith-Based Working Group: goals include identifying current programs or resources available to promote family reunification and advance faith-based and other community-based initiatives focused on family reunification; identify strategies to improve family involvement with offender reentry efforts; and identify strategies to enhance pre-release and post-release support provided by community-based groups.

Through implementation of previous findings and recommendations, as well as the body of work produced by the Reentry Task Force throughout the current biennium, the Reentry and Integration Division, alongside agency leadership, has created expanded and refined reentry service delivery systems.

## **Texas Risk Assessment System**

Reentry Program Supervisors and Managers completed certification as Texas Risk Assessment System (TRAS) Trainers and are qualified to train reentry case managers as certified end users of the assessment tool. Reentry Case Managers were trained and certified in the use of the TRAS, ensuring the TRAS is administered appropriately and provides an accurate risk level when administered to TDCJ offenders.

An automated Texas Risk Assessment System was implemented during the biennium. The TRAS was automated by the TDCJ Information Technology Division to provide a more efficient means for documenting the assessment results and building a case plan and individual reentry plan for those offenders who are identified as moderate or high criminogenic risk based upon the assessment results. Pre-release reentry case managers work with the offender to identify problem areas, goals, action steps, and community resources to aid in the offender's success upon release from TDCJ. The case plan transitions to both the supervising parole office and the community case manager post-release, providing continuity in the offender's transition from prison to community.

## **Enhancement to Birth Certificate and DPS Identification Card Ordering Process**

The Division has continued efforts to expand the population receiving a certified birth certificate and a DPS identification card. TDCJ's contract with the Department of State Health Services was modified to provide a process for obtaining a Texas birth certificate for offenders unable to physically appear in a Reentry Case Managers office to participate in the electronic ordering process. Additionally, processes for purchasing birth certificates for offenders born out-of-state are now being reviewed. The Division also worked with the Texas Department of Public Safety (DPS) to identify opportunities to increase the number of offenders approved for a Texas Identification card. Through that collaboration DPS implemented a change that makes individuals with a valid or renewable ID or license eligible to apply for an ID through the TDCJ Reentry Case Manager, increasing the number of offenders eligible for a Texas ID card. The Division also initiated discussion with DPS regarding the volume of applications that are rejected due to name discrepancies between the certified birth certificate and the TDCJ offender ID card. As a result, TDCJ has approved a modification to the offender ID card that will allow for the birth name to be included on the card. Upon implementation the modification to the offender ID card will result in a significant decrease in name-related rejections by DPS.

## **Reentry Program Expansion**

At the time of the 2014 Biennial Report, the reentry program operated with 126 pre-release and 13 post-release case managers providing reentry services across the state. The 84<sup>th</sup> Legislature appropriated funding for an additional 50 reentry case manager positions, bringing the total allocation to 189. This additional staffing allowed for expansion of post-release reentry services from 13 to 53 reentry case manager positions. These additional case managers were placed in district parole offices, community residential facilities (halfway houses) and intermediate sanction facilities across the state significantly expanding the number of offenders receiving post-release reentry services. The remaining 10 positions were designated for a new program component created to serve the special needs offender population.

These positions were assigned to TDCJ units where offenders with serious medical or mental health needs are housed. These newly allocated positions addressed above complement the existing 126 pre-release case managers who are responsible for ensuring identification documents are secured in addition to the completion of the risk assessment and associated case planning prior to an offender's release from TDCJ facilities.

## **Pre-Release Reentry Services**

Pre-release reentry services include Phase I and II of a three phased Reentry Program. During Phase I a reentry case manager assists eligible offenders in ordering identification documents prior to release, including a replacement Social Security card, certified birth certificate, military service record (DD-214), and DPS identification card. All identification documents obtained for an offender are issued to him/her at the time of release from TDCJ. These documents equip the offender with the identification information necessary to secure employment, housing, benefits and other services upon return to the community. During Phase II, the reentry case manager conducts a risk assessment for parole approved offenders to determine risk level as it relates to criminogenic need and risk of re-offending. Those that score moderate or high risk on the assessment are enrolled in individualized case planning. While case planning, the case manager and the offender work together to develop an individualized case plan that addresses the offender's needs, sets goals, lists action steps and identifies resources targeted toward equipping the offender for successful return to the community.

## **Special Needs Case Management**

Through coordinated efforts to ensure post-release continuity of care planning, special needs case managers work directly with unit medical staff, human services specialists, community resources, and the offenders and their families. In addition, pre-release benefit applications are submitted for those offenders who have severe and persistent illness to minimize delay in receiving eligible entitlements.

## **Post Release Reentry Services**

Phase III community based reentry services provide employment preparation classes, assistance in obtaining housing as well as other basic necessities and provides linkage with other community resources. Reentry staff also coordinate job fairs for unemployed and underemployed offenders, providing an opportunity for a potential employer to meet with an offender and take an application on site with the advance knowledge of the offender's status with the criminal justice system. The Division has worked in close collaboration with other TDCJ divisions and Windham School District to improve post release offender employment opportunities. Further, the Division has collaborated with Windham School District to obtain vocational certificates and on-the-job certifications to aid in job placement post release.

Through the automation and enhancement of referral reports, identification of eligible offenders for Phase III has increased case management enrollment during this report period.

## **Summary of Services Provided**

For the period of September 2014 through July 2016 reentry case managers completed 100,317 applications for birth certificates. Of those, 95,499 birth certificate requests were submitted to the Texas Department of State Health Services and 4,818 were submitted out of state. Case managers also submitted 111,131 applications for social security cards to the Social Security Administration and processed 48,768 offenders for Texas Department of Public Safety identification cards. The Reentry and Integration division's Verification and Identification Processing unit mailed 141,512 documents (birth certificates, social security cards, military service records, or DPS identification cards) to TDCJ units or parole offices for delivery to offenders.

In addition to pre- and post-release case management provided by the Reentry and Integration Division during the reporting period, resource guides were made available at various locations throughout the TDCJ's correctional facilities. A toll-free reentry hot line number is also provided which allows

offenders to contact the Reentry and Integration Division for additional assistance and referrals post-release. Reentry services were provided to 75,751 offenders with 33,229 offenders assessed utilizing the TRAS as part of the parole review process. Of those offenders assessed, a total of 18,232 who scored moderate or high in risk were enrolled in pre-release case management services with 1,998 not enrolled due to on-going treatment programming.

As a continuation of the case management program, reentry case managers enrolled 4,762 offenders in post-release case management. Further, 17,559 attended employment readiness classes facilitated by reentry case managers, and 25,735 referrals were provided for employment related services such as referral to an employer, assistance with the job application process, linkage to clothing resources, and other services.

### **Veterans Reentry Services**

The TDCJ and the Veterans Administration (VA) maintain an agreement for verification of veteran information through an electronic file transfer utilizing the Veteran Reentry Search Service (VRSS). Using this data, veterans nearing release are identified at which time the Reentry Veterans Services Coordinator notifies the Veterans Integrated Service Network and Military Veteran Peer Network (MVPN) staff as well as Reentry Case Managers to initiate the benefit application process prior to release. The reentry case manager will also discuss eligibility requirements, possible enrollment into the VA health care system and assist veterans in completing the benefits application packet. Case managers also provide offenders information regarding Hazelwood Act benefits, contact information for the MVPN representative and Texas Veterans Commission county service officer for the area where the offender plans to reside upon release. Medical provider information from the VA website is furnished and post release appointments with the VA for medical continuity of care are initiated, as needed.

Through a partnership with MVPN, veteran offenders are assessed and, if selected, enrolled in the reentry dorm program at the Travis State Jail. An approved veteran specific program curriculum provides a peer support model program designed to prepare veterans for a successful reentry into the community following incarceration.

## Reentry Initiatives

Beyond the implementation steps described thus far and their benefit to the state's reentry efforts, growth and development of the reentry program was demonstrated through numerous other endeavors throughout the biennium including:

- A process was implemented for tracking specific documents issued to each offender at time of releasing, providing a mechanism for trend analysis and reporting of related data.
- Collaboration with the Information Technology Division to develop tracking and oversight reports related to existing Reentry Program data.
- As a result of 84<sup>th</sup> legislature appropriations, TDCJ entered into agreements with the City of Houston and the City of Dallas to create and operate pilot program for local reentry services for offenders being released from TDCJ to the Houston and Dallas regions.
- Continued to expand reentry case manager involvement in release processing duties on prison units, including state jails, to further enhance continuity in offender transition from pre- to post-release reentry services.
- Coordination with Windham School District, Manufacturing and Logistics Division, and Parole Division to improve post-release employment opportunities for offenders through evaluation of pre-release training and certification and engagement with employers offering those job opportunities.
- Application for a grant through the Governor's office for the development of a web based application to be utilized by TDCJ staff and employers to connect with unemployed or underemployed offenders who have specific skills and certifications that meet the employer's needs.

## Looking Forward

The implementation steps and initiatives detailed thus far - additional staff, increasing the number of offenders who receive a DPS ID card, expansion of the community component and the addition of the special needs reentry component, in addition to a list of other activities mark significant growth and development of the reentry program. That momentum will continue with the following planned for the immediate future:

- Coordinate with Agency partners and DPS to reduce the number of offenders denied a DPS ID due to name related discrepancies.

- Implement a process by which the agency provides funding for certified birth certificate applications for offenders born in a state other than Texas.
- Coordinate with Information Technology Division to improve tracking and oversight of Reentry Program components.
- Coordinate with TDCJ departments to ensure release processes enhance the goal of a seamless reentry system.

## **Conclusion**

The significant progress realized since inception of the Reentry and Integration Division in September 2009 continued throughout this biennium. The TDCJ has continued to increase the number of offenders served through each component of the pre- and post-release reentry programs. Collaboration among partner agencies and organizations continues to increase, aiding in attaining the goal of a seamless system that prepares and equips the offender for success upon return to the community. As the next steps articulated in this report are accomplished the TDCJ will remain mindful that, while there have been many significant accomplishments, the work is not complete, and collaborative efforts with agency partners as well as local and state level partnerships must continue to ensure success for each individual offenders, and to reach the overarching goal of continuing to reduce recidivism in Texas.