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Agency News



Legislative update for TDCJ employees from the executive director

By Brad Livingston

Budget

The House and Senate versions of the General Appropriations Bill were filed on January 15, 2013. These bills will provide the starting point for the deliberations on budget matters impacting the Texas Department of Criminal Justice (TDCJ) as well as other state agencies. While it's common for the House and Senate budget proposals to differ, the bills as filed are identical in regards to appropriations for TDCJ.

Unlike two years ago, when the appropriations bill as introduced proposed substantial reductions in funding that would have negatively impacted agency operations, the preliminary budget bills filed in the House and Senate generally maintain current funding for the agency. There are some slight increases or decreases in funding for the basic supervision of probationers and parolees based on anticipated changes in offender caseloads, but these budget adjustments are intended to maintain the current level of services. One

notable exception is the absence of continued funding for the repair and rehabilitation of existing correctional facilities, but appropriations for major repairs of our existing physical plant are generally treated as an "exceptional item" in the budget process and will be discussed during future committee meetings.

Most of the agency's requests for increased funding above the "baseline" were not included in the bill as filed, but that comes as no surprise. Additional funding for offender health care, diversion and treatment programs, reentry and basic operational items like vehicles and computers will be the subject of deliberations later in the legislative session.

There are no pay raises for state employees included in the bills as introduced, but they do appropriate an additional \$503 million to provide funding for anticipated growth in the group insurance benefits program for state employees, retirees and their dependents. Employee pay raises, like the exceptional items previously mentioned, are

typically not included in the bill as filed, and are instead set aside for consideration later in the session.

Although these bills are just the starting point for legislative deliberations over the next five months, TDCJ begins this year's process in a substantially better position than in 2011. Through the agency website and the Connections newsletter we will keep you informed regarding future developments related to the TDCJ budget for fiscal years 2014 and 2015. Remember that final decisions regarding the budget will be made no earlier than May 2013. ●

Sunset

As of January 31 the TDCJ Sunset bill has yet to be filed. The introduced version will contain the recommendations adopted by the Texas Sunset Advisory Commission on September 5, 2012, to include continuing the agency for another eight years. In addition to periodic budget updates, we will keep you apprised of the progress of the TDCJ Sunset legislation. ●