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Message from the executive director

By Bryan Collier

It is my honor to serve as executive director of the Texas Department of Criminal Justice and to lead the more than 38,000 dedicated public servants who help make the state safer for all Texans. I sincerely believe there is no better workforce than the men and women employed by TDCJ. The daily challenges of operating a criminal justice agency are greater than most understand, but time and time again, when confronted by extraordinarily difficult circumstances such as the recent flooding in southeast Texas, our employees have risen to the occasion. I could not be prouder of this agency and its employees. I look forward to working with you to maintain past successes, add to our accomplishments and meet every challenge that comes our way.

One challenge facing the TDCJ, all state agencies and the Texas Legislature in the coming months is a fiscal environment that, while still the envy of most states, is less

robust than two years ago primarily due to falling oil and gas prices. Consequently, with only a few exceptions, state policymakers have asked agencies to submit an initial budget proposal for the Fiscal Years 2018-19 biennium that shows the impact of a 4 percent budget reduction. Although the 4 percent budget reduction must be reflected in what is known as the “base” request, agencies may seek additional funding through the submission of “exceptional items.”

The TDCJ Legislative Appropriations Request (LAR) for the Fiscal Years 2018-19 biennium has been prepared in accordance with the instructions given by the governor and the legislature. As you review the LAR, know that it reflects only a starting point for legislative deliberations. On multiple occasions this agency has worked with legislators as they craft a budget consistent with fiscal constraints. Sometimes appropriations have decreased, as they have increased at other

times, but the funding necessary to preserve an effective criminal justice system has always been maintained, and mitigating the impact of funding reductions on employees has been both a legislative and administrative priority.

The 85th legislative session convenes on January 10, 2017. As during past legislative sessions, we will use the agency website and the *Connections* newsletter to keep employees informed of the fiscal and policy decisions impacting the TDCJ and our workforce.

In closing, I want to thank every TDCJ employee for their public service, and extend my deepest sympathies to the family, friends and co-workers of Officer Mari Johnson, who died in the line of duty on July 16. Her death is a grim reminder of the risks agency staff confronts every day. You are true heroes. The people of Texas are fortunate to have you protecting their safety. ●