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Agency News

Sunset review offers preliminary recommendations

After months of review, the Sunset Advisory Commission has released staff's recommendations for the Texas Department of Criminal Justice (TDCJ). The review process, which began in September 2011, evaluates an agency's mission and recommends operational changes to ensure the goals of the agency are met and state funding is spent efficiently.

Citing the Legislature's investment in diversion and treatment programs, recent success in reducing recidivism rates and declining parole and probation revocation rates, sunset staff concluded the criminal justice system is working well, and recommended continuing TDCJ for another twelve years. The Commission's staff also gave recommendations on the following issues:

- **Reentry**

Produce a written reentry plan with detailed goals and strategies, and evaluate the impact of reentry services using recidivism data and other means; adopt one consistent needs assessment tool, which would include criminogenic factors, for use in managing offenders on probation, parole, and in prison; use existing resources to implement a case management system for offenders; capture all of the offender's risk and needs information in the Individual Treatment Plan (ITP), including participation in state-funded and volunteer programs; expand the statutory membership and duties of the Reentry Task Force.

- **Community supervision**

Establish standard processes for each of the Community Justice Assistance Division's grant programs; research and consider modifications to its performance-based funding formulas and report its recommendations to the Legislature.

- **Offender health care**

Clarify TDCJ's authority to contract with any healthcare provider, to include, but not be limited to, specifically named university providers; adhere to standard contracting requirements when entering into any contract related to offender health care; abolish the Correctional Managed Health Care Committee as an independent state agency and restructure it as a new committee providing medical expertise to the Texas Board of Criminal Justice.

- **Texas Correctional Industries (TCI)**

Authorize TCI to sell its manufactured goods to privately run correctional facilities, allowing the opportunity to increase TCI's sales revenue.

- **Crime victims**

Develop a standard form for use by victim assistance coordinators when a victim fails to return a Victim Impact Statement; develop standard procedures for use by attorney offices prosecuting criminal cases that are designed to increase the number victim impact statements received by TDCJ.

- **Recruiting**

Research and implement innovative alternatives to recruit a more diverse workforce.

The Sunset Advisory Commission heard public testimony and comment from Sunset staff on June 5, 2012. Later in the year the Commission will meet again, at which time they will adopt recommendations to be submitted to the Legislature for consideration when it convenes in January 2013. The Sunset staff report can be viewed at the following link: http://www.sunset.state.tx.us/83rd/CJ/CJ_SR.pdf ●