



TEXAS CRIMINAL
JUSTICE COALITION

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FACT SHEET

MAKE TDCJ MORE RESPONSIBLE FOR RE-INTEGRATING OFFENDERS WITH FURTHER INVOLVEMENT IN AND RESPONSIBILITY FOR PROJECT RIO, TDCJ CAN BE HELD MORE ACCOUNTABLE

OFFENDERS MUST BE GIVEN RESOURCES TO SUCCESSFULLY RE-ENTER BACK INTO SOCIETY.

Texas law designates 1,941 individual offenses as felonies, which has created a huge felon population in our state. In fact, approximately 1 in 11 Texas adults has a felony conviction on his or her record, and Texas has over 100 state laws that forbid felons from obtaining certain jobs. In 2005 alone, the Texas Department of Criminal Justice (TDCJ) released 64,512 felons from incarceration. These are people who must find jobs and housing or else risk turning to illegal activity to survive.

But in addition to employment-prohibitive state laws, many parolees are released to society with few job skills, a low educational level, drug and alcohol problems, and a host of psychosocial adjustment issues – all of which lead to greater job instability and, on average, low income levels.

WHAT IS PROJECT RIO?

Project RIO (Re-Integration of Offenders) is a state program that encourages individuals to take advantage of educational and vocational services while incarcerated, and then assists these individuals in obtaining documents necessary for employment. Project RIO has also created placement services to give offenders practical work experience in their areas of training. The program is currently administered by the Texas Workforce Commission (TWC) in collaboration with local Workforce Development Boards, TDCJ, the Windham School District, and the Texas Youth Commission.

WHAT DOES H.B. 3637 DO?

House Bill 3637 would transfer the responsibility of administering Project RIO from TWC to TDCJ. As such, TDCJ would be charged with developing and maintaining a statewide network for finding positions of employment that require the skills possessed by project participants (both adult and juvenile offenders). In addition, TDCJ would be responsible for assisting these participants in securing employment while also drafting and enforcing the standards and guidelines for accomplishing this.

H.B. 3637 WILL ENSURE BETTER IMPLEMENTATION, ACCOUNTABILITY, AND SUCCESS FOR PROJECT RIO.

Giving responsibility of Project RIO to TDCJ while maintaining coordination with TWC will allow TDCJ increased control and oversight of the program. In addition, TDCJ will have the capacity to certify prospective employees for the Work Opportunity Tax Credit program, which provides a tax incentive to employers for hiring economically disadvantaged ex-offenders. Project RIO also makes available free fidelity bonding services to the employer community, making the employment of ex-offenders and adjudicated youth more attractive.

In bestowing franchise tax credits to employers who hire formerly incarcerated individuals, the State will promote ex-offenders' re-integration into the economy. These tax credits should offset any diminished marketability of offenders in hiring due to liability or other issues which discourage them from being hired.