



WRITTEN TESTIMONY

**SUBMITTED BY KEN TRAN, POLICY ANALYST
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REGARDING SENATE BILL 838

HOUSE COMMITTEE ON CORRECTIONS

MAY 11, 2007

Dear Members of the Committee,

My name is Ken Tran. I am a Policy Analyst with the Texas Criminal Justice Coalition. Thank you for allowing me this opportunity to present testimony regarding Senate Bill 838.

REFORMING THE PAROLE SYSTEM IS FUNDAMENTAL TO PREVENTING PRISON OVER-CROWDING AND IMPROVING PUBLIC SAFETY.

The acts of alleviating prison crowding and securing our communities are not mutually exclusive. Parole policy should be designed to assist former offenders re-integrating into society by enabling them to become self-sufficient, responsible working members of the community. Revoking parolees and sending them back to prison to serve lengthy sentences for what are minor and administrative offenses will only make them more hardened criminals who will find it more difficult to re-integrate into society when they are re-released.

WHAT DOES S.B. 838 DO?

S.B. 838 would provide parole panels with several options for handling cases in which individuals on parole or mandatory supervision violate a condition of their release. The bill would allow a parole panel to send a releasee to a county jail for a period 60 to 180 days, to an intermediate sanction facility for 60 days to a year, or to a substance abuse treatment facility for 180 days to a year depending on the nature and severity of the violation.

Furthermore, S.B. 838 would prohibit a parole panel from revoking a person's parole or mandatory supervision solely for an administrative violation of release conditions or for being convicted of a misdemeanor after release.

PAROLE TERMS ARE CURRENTLY TOO LONG TO BE COST-EFFECTIVE AND TOO WEAK TO SIGNIFICANTLY AFFECT PAROLEES' BEHAVIOR.

National research shows that "surveillance-oriented supervision" is ineffective. Most violators spend only 90 days in prison before returning to the community. Putting them back in prison for committing a violation does little to improve behavior in the long term.

Release policies must aim to help offenders make lasting behavioral changes, thereby better preventing recidivism. This can be better achieved through "intensive treatment-oriented supervision." Parole officers must find new ways to communicate with offenders so as to become problem-solvers rather than just reactionary paternal agents.

Currently, parole in Texas serves as a "hammer" when a parolee violates parole. But, as Kansas Secretary of Corrections Roger Werholtz, says, "When you hammer people so often, it becomes meaningless."ⁱ Both the law enforcement approach and the social work approach must be incorporated into the parole system for it to be successful. Having an effective review process in place would facilitate such a compromise.

Thank you for allowing me the opportunity to present testimony regarding Senate Bill 838. This measure will assist former offenders who are re-integrating into society by enabling them to become self-sufficient, responsible working members of the community. I hope the committee will pass this bill.

ⁱ Potter, Tim. "Parole policies vs. public safety." *The Wichita Eagle*. March 11, 2007.