



TEXAS CRIMINAL
JUSTICE COALITION

OVERVIEW OF 82nd TEXAS LEGISLATURE: SMART-ON-CRIME JUVENILE AND CRIMINAL JUSTICE POLICIES

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Juvenile and Criminal Justice Landscape

Juvenile Justice System: 2005 – Present

- ◆ **Pre-2005:** Juvenile justice is a **back-burner issue** in Texas.
- ◆ **2005 Legislative Session:** **2 juvenile justice bills** are filed (addressing youth length-of-stay requirements, lack of cultural competence in treatment programs and among field staff, and the lack of independent investigation of abuse and neglect in the Texas Youth Commission). The bills die in committee.
- ◆ **2006-2007:** Intense media and governmental scrutiny expose **abuse and violence** taking place in TYC.
- ◆ **Spring 2007:** State leaders effect an **immediate change in TYC leadership** and launch a joint investigative committee.
- ◆ **May 2007:** Policy-makers pass omnibus reform legislation (S.B. 103) with unanimous bi-partisan support. The legislation contains more than **150 specific reforms** for the agency to accomplish.

Juvenile and Criminal Justice Landscape

Juvenile Justice System: 2005 – Present *[continued]*

- ◆ **2008:** Texas' juvenile justice agencies undergo Sunset review. These include TYC, the Texas Juvenile Probation Commission (TJPC), and the Office of the Independent Ombudsman (OIO). The resulting Sunset legislation redirected a significant amount of funding toward **rehabilitation programs operated by county juvenile probation departments** without inadvertently de-funding or destabilizing any progress made by TYC in its ongoing reform effort. It also continued TYC and TJPC as **stand-alone agencies** subject to a two-year probationary period.
- ◆ **January 2011:** Largely as a cost-savings measure, the Sunset Commission votes in favor of a motion to **abolish both TYC and TJPC**, instead transferring their discrete functions to a new umbrella agency.
- ◆ **2011 Legislative Session:** Senate and House budgets reduce TYC's institutional capacity, calling for the **closure of up to three facilities**. New Sunset legislation will effectively redirect currently incarcerated youth to the juvenile probation system or to remaining lock-ups.

Juvenile and Criminal Justice Landscape

Adult Criminal Justice System: 2003 – Present

- ◆ **2003:** We begin to shift the dialogue from a tough-on-crime to smart-on-crime sentiment, promoting the establishment of the use of progressive sanctions for drug offenses involving possession of small amounts of certain controlled substances (which was signed into law), the shortening and strengthening of probation term lengths, and a stronger treatment infrastructure. Unfortunately, the state budget shortfall results in cuts to probation, treatment, and parole – driving the **prisons** to a **breaking point**.
- ◆ **2005:** Mass mobilization of individuals advocating for smart-on-crime reforms results in furthering policies that increase **accountability for drug task forces** and increase **accessibility to identification cards** for previously incarcerated individuals, while also allocating **additional funds for probation**.
- ◆ **January 2007:** Texas faces a projected prison population increase of up to **17,000** inmates in the next five years (in addition to the nearly 6,000 beds added between 2004 and 2007) if Texas' pace of incarceration continues.

Juvenile and Criminal Justice Landscape

Adult Criminal Justice System: 2003 – Present

- ◆ **2007 Legislative Session:** Rather than spending nearly \$2 billion on new prison construction and operations, policy-makers work **collaboratively and diligently** to reinvest a fraction of this amount – **\$241 million** – in probation, alternatives to incarceration, parole, etc.
- ◆ **2007 – 2011: 91 new crime reduction strategies** positively change the course of the criminal justice system, resulting in **savings to taxpayers** and the **lowest crime rate** Texas has had since 1985.
 - 2007: 33 bills
 - 2009: 31 bills
 - 2011: 27 bills
- ◆ **2011:** Historical shifts result in the **first prison closure** (Sugar Land Facility).

Smart-On-Crime Strategies

2011 Reforms – Juvenile Justice

Merger of TYC and TJPC

- ◆ **S.B. 653 (Whitmire, Hegar, and Hinojosa; Representatives Madden, Bonnen, McClendon, and Cook):** Sunset bill that consolidates and combines the powers and duties of TYC and TJPC into a new umbrella agency, the Texas Juvenile Justice Department (TJJD), to take effect December 1, 2011. *Signed by the Governor!*

Major Components of Sunset Legislation

- Prioritizes the use of **community- and/or family-based programs** over the commitment of youths to secure facilities.
- Maintains the **OIO as an independent agency** to oversee the rights of youth committed to state facilities, and authorizes it to review local probation department data on complaints.
- Adds **specialized treatment** to intake planning and adds histories of medical, sex offense, and violent offense to the current examinations.



2011 Reforms – Juvenile Justice

Merger of TYC and TJPC

Major Components of Sunset Legislation [Continued]

- Maintains an ongoing **zero-tolerance policy** on sexual abuse.
- Maintains **continuity of educational services** to youth, including special education services.
- Requires TJJD to provide **prevention and intervention** services for at-risk youth ages 6-17 who are subject to compulsory school attendance or under juvenile court jurisdiction.
- Clarifies **individualized re-entry plans** for each youth to ensure s/he receives continuity of care, including, as applicable, housing assistance, step-down programs, family counseling, academic and vocational mentoring, trauma counseling for any youth who is a victim of abuse while in the TJJD's custody, and/or other specialized treatment services.

Smart-On-Crime Strategies

2011 Reforms – Juvenile Justice

- ◆ **H.B. 350 (Representative Walle and Senator Van de Putte):** Gives judges the authority to order tutoring, when appropriate, in response to juvenile Class C misdemeanors issued to public school students younger than 17 years of age; this will restore missed class time, bring students back onto a stable learning path, and address the underlying behavior, thus reducing dropout rates and minimizing involvement in the costly school-to-prison pipeline. *Although exact savings cannot be determined at this time, a **positive fiscal impact** could be achieved through savings associated with fewer youth entering the juvenile or adult criminal justice systems. Signed by the Governor!*
- ◆ **S.B. 1489 (Senator Whitmire and Representative Madden):** Changes the minimum age at which a child can be charged for truancy (a Class C misdemeanor) from 6 to 12 years of age, recognizing that children at a very young age are not solely responsible for their absences. *Although exact savings cannot be determined at this time, a **positive fiscal impact** could be achieved through savings associated with fewer youth entering the juvenile justice system unnecessarily. Signed by the Governor!*

Smart-On-Crime Strategies

2011 Reforms – Juvenile Justice

- ◆ **H.B. 2015 (Representative Thompson and Senator Jim Jackson):** Changes a charge against a youth for prostitution from “delinquent conduct,” which is a misdemeanor, to “conduct indicating a need for supervision,” which connects the youth to support services through probation and possibly places the child in a suitable foster home or other residential setting. *No significant fiscal implication to the State is anticipated. Signed by the Governor!*

Smart-On-Crime Strategies

2011 Reforms – Juvenile Justice

- ◆ **S.B. 1208 (Senator Whitmire and Representative Madden):** Extends the age of determinate sentence probation jurisdiction by the juvenile judge from 18 to 19, allowing the court more time to work with the youth on rehabilitative efforts. *Although exact savings cannot be determined at this time, a **positive fiscal impact** could be achieved over time through savings associated with lowered recidivism rates. Signed by the Governor!*
- ◆ **S.B. 1209 (Senator Whitmire; Representatives Marquez, Madden, Allen, Perry, and Workman):** Allows, as a local option, a juvenile under 17 years of age who is certified to stand trial as an adult to be held in a juvenile detention center as opposed to an adult jail pending trial. *No fiscal impact on the state or counties is anticipated. Signed by the Governor!*

Smart-On-Crime Strategies

2011 Reforms – Juvenile Justice

- ◆ **H.B. 961 (Representative Turner and Senator Hinojosa):** Reduces the minimum age at which a person with a juvenile felony conviction may petition the court to have his or her record sealed (from 21 to 19 years of age), while also reducing the minimum age at which a person may be eligible for automatic restriction of access to his or her juvenile records for conduct that was neither violent nor involved habitual felonies (from 21 to 17). *Although exact savings cannot be determined at this time, a **positive fiscal impact** could be achieved through savings associated with a more successful re-entry transition among youth and young adults. Signed by the Governor!*

Smart-On-Crime Strategies

2011 Reforms – Adult Sentencing and Efficiency

- ◆ **H.B. 2649 (Representative Allen and Senator Ellis):** Allows diligent participation (“good time”) credits for state jail inmates, giving them the opportunity to earn time off of their sentences through self-improvement programming, work programs, and vocational achievement. *H.B. 2649 will have a **positive fiscal impact of roughly \$49 million** on the state budget through August 2013. Signed by the Governor!*

Smart-On-Crime Strategies

2011 Reforms – Diversions

- ◆ **H.B. 1771 (Representative Madden and Senator Harris):** Establishes a 7-member Specialty Courts Advisory Council in the Governor's Criminal Justice Division (CJD) to evaluate specialty courts' applications for grant funding and make funding recommendations to the CJD, in effect better ensuring that funds are distributed in a manner necessary to maintain support in all areas of Texas. *No significant fiscal implication to the State is anticipated. Signed by the Governor!*
- ◆ **H.B. 1994 (Representative Weber and Senator Van de Putte):** Enables the commissioners court of a county or governing body of a municipality to create a voluntary-participation, first-offender prostitution prevention program, with such offerings as classroom instruction, counseling, education, and treatment with respect to prostitution prevention, sex addiction, sexually transmitted diseases, mental health, and substance abuse; as an incentive to participate, a judge or magistrate may excuse certain conditions of community supervision and grant an order of nondisclosure for successful participation. *There would be a positive fiscal impact to a county or a municipality that chose to create such a prevention program for the collection of the victim services fee, but the amount would vary depending on the number of participants and the amount of the program fee. Signed by the Governor!*

Smart-On-Crime Strategies

2011 Reforms – Mental Health

- ◆ **H.B. 748 (Representative Menendez and Sen. Van de Putte):** Allows a court to give defendants “time served” credits when they spend time in a mental health facility or jail awaiting a determination of competency, as well as while in jail awaiting an available bed at a mental health facility; this period of time will count toward the maximum time a defendant is allowed to remain at a treatment facility. Additionally, defendants who have not achieved competency within the maximum restoration period will have the initial charges dismissed. ***No significant fiscal implication to the State is anticipated. Signed by the Governor!***

Source: Mental Health America of Greater Houston, 82nd Legislature Legislative Wrap-Up for Mental Health (2011)

Smart-On-Crime Strategies

2011 Reforms – Mental Health

- ◆ **H.B. 2725 (Representative Hartnett and Senator Williams):** Makes several modifications to the competency restoration process, including: (1) authorizing judges to consider a broader scope of evidence and options to bypass the forensic commitment process and order more appropriate placements for those who are not likely to be restored; and (2) authorizing DSHS and HHSC to study the cost-effectiveness of providing home- and community-based services instead of institutionalization. *No significant fiscal implication to the State is anticipated.*
Signed by the Governor!

Source: Mental Health America of Greater Houston, 82nd Legislature Legislative Wrap-Up for Mental Health (2011)



2011 Reforms – Mental Health

- ◆ **TDCJ Rider 47:** Requires coordination among mental health providers (e.g., TCOOMMI, DSHS, community mental health centers) and county/municipal jails for purposes of establishing methods for the continuity of care for pre- and post-release activities of defendants who are returned to the county of conviction after the defendant's competency has been restored.

Source: Mental Health America of Greater Houston, 82nd Legislature Legislative Wrap-Up for Mental Health (2011)

Smart-On-Crime Strategies

2011 Reforms – Probation

- ◆ **H.B. 1205 (Representatives Turner, Allen, Aliseda, Eddie Rodriguez, and Gallego; Senator Ellis):** Permits incentives for self-improvement among probationers, specifically through the use of time credits for the completion of treatment and programming (e.g., education, vocation, life skills courses). *Local governments may experience a **positive fiscal impact** due to the increased collection of court costs and fines and a decreased workload when the length of defendants' community supervision is reduced. Signed by the Governor!*
- ◆ **H.B. 2624 (Representative Sheffield and Senator Van de Putte):** Requires pre-sentence investigation reports to include information on defendants' current or former military status, specifically to determine if defendants were deployed to a combat zone and suffer from related mental disorders (e.g., PTSD or TBI) and thus better ensuring that judges have all information necessary to consider mitigating factors when sentencing veterans suffering from combat-related mental health disorders. *Although exact savings cannot be determined at this time, a **positive fiscal impact** could be achieved through savings associated with reduced incarceration costs. Signed by the Governor!*

Smart-On-Crime Strategies

2011 Reforms – Probation

- ◆ **S.B. 1055 (Senator Carona; Representatives Madden and White):** Improves community justice plans by requiring their submission during even-numbered years, so that the **needs of community justice divisions can be accounted for in the budget-making process**. Also creates a permissive state/local incentive-based funding program, under which counties may set target reduction goals (in partnership with other counties, if they choose) to reduce the number of commitments to incarceration; participating counties will receive an up-front, lump sum of the savings from commitment reductions to establish the programs necessary to meet their reduction goals, and funds will later be apportioned to participating counties based on their continued performance and ability to achieve their desired goals *Although exact savings cannot be determined at this time, a **positive fiscal impact** could be achieved over time through savings associated with commitment reductions in participating counties, as well as lowered recidivism rates. Signed by the Governor!*

Smart-On-Crime Strategies

2011 Reforms – Parole

- ◆ **H.B. 2735 (Representative Madden and Senator Hinojosa):** Creates expedited bonding procedures for “blue warrant” parolees charged with certain new offenses or administrative (technical) violations of parole conditions. *A county could experience a **positive fiscal impact** related to county jail expenses as a result of the ability to release a person who would otherwise be required to be held until a hearing. Signed by the Governor!*

Smart-On-Crime Strategies

2011 Reforms – Re-Entry

- ◆ **H.B. 200 (Representative Parker and Senator Whitmire):** Requires the Texas Department of Criminal Justice to electronically notify the U.S. Social Security Administration about the release or discharge of a prisoner from a state correctional facility, if s/he was receiving Supplemental Security Income or Social Security Disability Insurance immediately prior to confinement, but only if s/he was confined for less than 12 consecutive months. **No significant fiscal implication to the State is anticipated.** *Signed by the Governor!*
- ◆ **H.B. 1106 (Representative Johnson and Senator West):** Assists those who are placed on deferred adjudication community supervision by first requiring judges to disclose to criminal defendants their post-conviction right to petition the court for an order of nondisclosure. **No significant fiscal implication to the State is anticipated.** *Signed by the Governor!*

Smart-On-Crime Strategies

2011 Reforms – Re-Entry

- ◆ **S.B. 144 (Senator West; Representatives Thompson, Gallego, Yvonne Davis, and Aliseda):** Allows the Governor, with the written recommendation and advice of a majority of the Board of Pardons and Paroles, to grant reprieves and commutations of punishments and pardons, as well as to remit fines and forfeitures, after an individual completes a term of deferred adjudication community supervision. **NOTE:** This will take effect January 1, 2012, provided the constitutional amendment proposed by the 82nd Legislature authorizing the Governor to grant a pardon to a person who successfully completes a term of deferred adjudication community supervision is approved by the voters. *Although exact savings cannot be determined at this time, a **positive fiscal impact** could be achieved through savings associated with a more successful re-entry transition. Signed by the Governor!*

Smart-On-Crime Strategies

2011 Reforms – Re-Entry

- ◆ **S.B. 462 (Senator West; Representatives Veasey and Gallego):** Provides for expunctions in the event that the individual has been acquitted at trial, or the individual has been released and there have been no charges filed, no pending charges, no final conviction, and no period of community supervision; also allows for an expunction in the event of a conviction for a Class C misdemeanor, and sets specific time intervals prior to expunction for various offense levels. *Although exact savings cannot be determined at this time, a **positive fiscal impact** could be achieved through savings associated with a more successful re-entry transition.* *Signed by the Governor!*
- ◆ **S.B. 198 (Senator West; Representatives West and Todd Smith):** Addresses the “Romeo and Juliet” dilemma by exempting teenagers (19 years of age or younger) who are convicted of a certain offense involving consensual sexual conduct with another teenager (at least 15 years old, and no more than four years younger than the sexual partner) from the requirement of registering as a sex offender for life in Texas. ***No significant fiscal implication to the State is anticipated.*** *Signed by Governor!*

Smart-On-Crime Strategies

2011 Reforms – Innocence

- ◆ **H.B. 215 (Representatives Gallego, Hartnett, Giddings, Carter, and Branch; Senator Ellis):** Improves identification procedures in criminal cases by requiring a model for photograph and live eyewitness identification lineups to be implemented by law enforcement agencies. *Although exact savings cannot be determined at this time, a **positive fiscal impact** at the state level could be achieved through savings associated with reduced incarceration costs and decreased appeals costs. Signed by the Governor!*
- ◆ **S.B. 122 (Senator Ellis; Representatives Gallego, Hartnett, Yvonne Davis, Zedler, and Eddie Rodriguez):** Clarifies Texas' post-conviction DNA statute to ensure greater testing availability by requiring a motion for post-conviction DNA testing to be granted if the biological evidence was not previously tested, or if it was previously tested but can be subjected to newer testing techniques with more accurate and probative results; also provides more opportunities to identify those who have been wrongfully convicted by requiring unidentified DNA profiles to be compared with those in the CODIS DNA database and DPS's database. *Although exact savings cannot be determined at this time, a **positive fiscal impact** at the state level could be achieved through savings associated with shortened prison term lengths. Signed by the Governor!*

Smart-On-Crime Strategies

2011 Reforms – Indigent Defense and Innocence

- ◆ **H.B. 1754 (Representative Gallego; Senators Wentworth and Ellis):** Creates the Texas Indigent Defense Commission, an expanded and permanent body to develop standards and policies for indigent defendants at the trial, appeal, and post-conviction stages; also provides counties the ability to establish and maintain a managed assigned counsel program. **No significant fiscal implication to the State is anticipated.** *Signed by the Governor!*
- ◆ **S.B. 1681 (Senator Ellis; Representatives Thompson, Gallego, and Alonzo):** Clarifies that various Fair Defense Act provisions apply to appeals in criminal cases and to probation revocation hearings; also requires trial counsel to (a) advise a defendant of his or her right to file a motion for new trial or motion for appeal, and (b) help the defendant request appointment of replacement counsel if the defendant wishes to pursue either remedy, before being permitted by the court to withdraw representation. **No significant fiscal implication to the State is anticipated.** *Signed by the Governor!*

Moving Forward

Keys to Public Safety

- ◆ Continue to invest in strategies that truly address **the root causes of crime**.
 - Incarceration accounts for more than **88%** of the state's corrections spending (more than **\$6 billion**), and only **12%** is allocated for diversions such as probation, treatment, and parole.
 - Yet **incarceration results in significantly greater levels of re-offending than treatment and other risk-reduction alternatives**, which are proven to be more cost-efficient and programmatically effective.
- ◆ According to the National Institute of Corrections at the U.S. Department of Justice:
 - **Punishment increases** an individual's inclination towards criminal activity by **.07%**.
 - **Treatment decreases** an individual's inclination towards criminal activity by **15%**.
 - **Cognitive skills programs decrease** an individual's inclination towards criminal activity by **29%**, making them most effective at decreasing criminal behavior.

Moving Forward

Cuts Texas **CANNOT** Afford

◆ **Probation:**

- According to data from the LBB, average inmate costs-per-day in prisons ring in at **\$50.79**, while each probationer's cost-per-day to the state is only **\$1.24**. Put another way, the cost of 9 days of prison is equal to an entire year of probation.

◆ **Parole:**

- With prison beds costing the state **\$50.79** per inmate per day – and parole costing only **\$3.74** per individual per day – the beds must be preserved for individuals who have committed violent offenses and who will have a higher risk of failure on parole.

◆ **Mental Health:**

- According to LBB sources, mental health treatment options are the most needed resources to rehabilitate individuals in the community.

Moving Forward

Risk-Reduction Alternatives We Will Continue Pushing For

- ◆ Make the criminal justice system a place of **last resort**, not the first option for those suffering from mental health disorders or the disease of addiction. People should be diverted away from incarceration if they have **low-level, nonviolent offenses** and would benefit more fully from treatment.
- ◆ Promote policies that will deter criminal behavior rather than focusing on **criminal enhancements**.
- ◆ Save the state and county taxpayers millions of dollars by **re-examining penalties and thresholds** for various low-level, nonviolent offenses that do not endanger communities. The over-criminalization of low-level offenses is costing Texas taxpayers millions of dollars.
- ◆ Increase the **professional development** of agency staff and practitioners through trainings that promote evidence-based practices and measurable outcomes.
- ◆ Begin **preparing for re-entry** during the intake process into prison or jail.

Moving Forward

Risk-Reduction Alternatives We Will Continue Pushing For

- ◆ Strengthen investments in both **in-prison and community-based treatment services** (especially mental health and substance abuse) for pre-trial defendants, inmates, and individuals re-entering our communities.
- ◆ Strengthen investments in **pre- and post-release employment services** to help re-entering individuals become self-sufficient, productive community members.
- ◆ Proactively **target “frequent flyers,”** who cycle in and out of jails at high rates and great costs.
- ◆ Encourage incentives to strengthen and expand **public defender systems** in Texas, and strengthen investments in the new **Texas Indigent Defense Commission** to support evidence-based programs and impact statewide performance standards.
- ◆ Safely increase the use of assessment-based **personal bonds**.

Moving Forward

Risk-Reduction Alternatives We Will Continue Pushing For *Juvenile Justice*

- ◆ Increase **support** for and **oversight** of county-level probation programs.
- ◆ Ensure that youth continue to be kept **separate** from the state's adult criminal population.
- ◆ Ensure the juvenile justice system has **qualified staff** that can properly implement rehabilitative programming, as well as maintain control and safety in juvenile facilities.
- ◆ **Stop over-criminalizing** petty juvenile misbehavior and implement diversion programs for **first-time offenses** using research-informed practices.
- ◆ Minimize the “**school-to-prison pipeline**” caused by strict school discipline policies.
- ◆ Ensure that youth have access to high quality **pre- and post-release rehabilitative programming**, which fosters a more successful transition to the community.

Moving Forward

Without Smart Policy Changes...

Adult System

- ◆ **Adult prisons will fill up** with individuals who have committed administrative rule violations or minor crimes.
- ◆ If parole release rates fall, **prisons will become a bottleneck** for those eligible for release.
- ◆ **Taxpayers will foot the bill** for thousands more people to be warehoused rather than be given the (much less expensive) rehabilitative help they need to become responsible, productive community members.

Juvenile System

- ◆ More youth may **enter the system**, including via harsh penalties at school.
- ◆ Youth may **fail to get the rehabilitative help** they need, in turn re-entering the juvenile justice system or matriculating to the adult system.

Moving Forward

Lessons Learned

- ◆ The real work begins *after* the passage of policies. **Monitoring** the implementation of new provisions and providing **feedback** to stakeholders is key.
- ◆ **Evidence-based practices and data** must inform the utilization of diversion programs and sentencing decisions.
- ◆ Leadership must appoint **experts with an effective track record** to run juvenile and criminal justice programs and agencies.
- ◆ One organization cannot do advocacy and evaluation work alone. **Coalition work** is critical – even when the organizations may not see eye-to-eye on every issue. Collaborative groups should include members of agencies, practitioners, advocates, and members of affected communities.
- ◆ The state must provide **sufficient resources and proper staffing levels** to meet the needs of system-involved individuals and adequately implement services and programs. This holds true for both state- and local-level programming. County-based treatment infrastructures are critical for handling individuals diverted from confinement.

Moving Forward

Final Consideration

Approximately 48% of individuals incarcerated in Texas' adult prisons and state jails are there for **nonviolent** offenses. Furthermore, approximately **80%** of individuals entering prisons and state jails in Fiscal Year 2010 were nonviolent. The **nearly 73,000** nonviolent individuals on hand in prisons and state jails alone are costing taxpayers **more than \$3.7 million daily**.

It is long overdue that we ask ourselves a practical question:

*What have we gained through the inefficient and costly incarceration of thousands of Texans whose risk of re-offending would have been more effectively reduced if they would have received **programming, treatment, re-entry tools, and meaningful supervision?***

BOTTOM LINE: Passing policies that responsibly divert individuals from confinement, and shifting money from **risk containment** to **risk reduction**, means greater taxpayer savings, fewer victims, and stronger and healthier communities in the long term.

Keeping You Informed!

Please log on to www.CriminalJusticeCoalition.org/about/email_alerts to sign up for e-alerts and get more information about the following:

- TCJC's work and our new public education materials
- Interim and legislative committee hearing notices and related materials
- Policy analysis
- Links to key report findings by other researchers and advocates
- Features on criminal and juvenile justice practitioners and programs
- Media clips that discuss criminal and juvenile justice
- Funding opportunities
- Upcoming events
- Important upcoming dates

We also want to hear what's **important in your community**. Please let us know about innovative strategies you are implementing, as well as policy areas in need of reform.

Lastly, we would love the opportunity to partner with you and, through our public education and policy advocacy efforts, we can **work together** to improve the lives of Texans.

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