

From:
To: [Janet Wood](#)
Subject: Re: Sunset Review of TDCJ, Correctional Managed Health Care Committee, Windham School District, BPP
Date: Tuesday, October 15, 2024 11:22:11 AM

These are my comments.

Having mentored women in prison since 2010, and 2 male family members who've been incarcerated, I could go on and on about the stories they have told me. To honor your time and mine, I will try to keep this as brief as possible.

"This Sunset review occurred in the context of both TDCJ's systemwide prison lockdown due to unprecedented levels of contraband and violence and inmate population projections that exceed TDCJ's operational capacity, raising basic questions about TDCJ's ability to handle its current and future realities. The state's criminal justice entities are confronting serious challenges in executing their mission to safely confine, supervise, and provide services for adults convicted of certain crimes in Texas. This Sunset review therefore seeks to best position TDCJ and its counterparts so that they are able to prevent current problems from becoming unmanageable, widespread crises in the coming years."

Thoughts: the systemic problems of violence and contraband in addition to increased inmate pool need to be thought of in a larger context. How can minds - often, minds facing depression, anxiety and personality disorders - be shifted from violence, contraband and continued criminality? Where are the psychologists?

""Furthermore, while difficulty hiring correctional staff isn't unique to this state, the agency has not done enough to mitigate this problem. Serious and systemic deficiencies in human resources functions, which form the backbone of effective agency operations, contribute to agencywide hiring and retention problems, with more than half of TDCJ divisions at a vacancy rate of at least 20 percent in fiscal year 2023."

Thoughts: what I've heard from many inmates over the course of 14 years is corrupt CO's stirring the hateful atmosphere in the pods/cellblocks and purposefully instigating fighting or other nefarious activity. The mentality of the inmate who comes from a relatively stable home environment is that they have to mentally shift and purposefully become like the worst in order to stay alive. The CO's and staff have an opportunity to be role models and to stand for truth and hope. When they don't, inmates question why they should try to make an effort to improve their lives and circumstances. Why bother? So, there's a cycle: CO instigates by way of lying (or whatever method) > inmate who was doing good now feels defeated > inmate reacts > CO writes them up > inmate reacts again possibly downgraded to a lower level > inmate goes back to doing good > CO instigates and the cycle starts over. I've seen this for years with different women I've mentored. I find that the inmate tries to keep to themselves & stay out of trouble, but is drawn into various dramas resulting in a mark against them. COs need to report what they see other COs doing. Retaliation is real so anonymity is paramount.

"TDCJ does not maintain a comprehensive inventory of its rehabilitation programs and

reported a varying number of them throughout the Sunset review. TDCJ also does not evaluate the majority of its rehabilitation programs, preventing the agency from sufficiently determining which programs are effective. Moreover, the lack of systemwide strategic planning and oversight around programming creates lengthy program placement timelines for parole-contingent programs, and the agency's divisional structure around these programs is inefficient. These placement times limit rehabilitation opportunities prior to release and unduly extend parole-voted release timelines, costing the state millions of dollars annually by having TDCJ continue to house, feed, and provide health care to individuals who would otherwise be released."

Thoughts: I've seen this many times where an inmate is approved for parole and it can take almost a year for them to be released. I understand there are class/es to go through prior to release but they are not a year long (not counting Changes which can be a year long). This time length is excruciating on the inmates and their families and as the report summary says, is very expensive.

"Issue 6 BPP Does Not Ensure Its Decision-Making Processes are Fair, Consistent, Transparent, and Data-Informed."

Thoughts: I concur. In a state where a murder sentence is 20 years and aggravated robbery where no one was killed is 45 years, it makes no sense to retain a first time offender who was clearly a pawn used by others for 45 years, yet let a murderer go after 20, or even less - if/when they parole out. The parole board, like TDCJ, needs to be overhauled starting at the very top and going all the way down.

"Key Recommendations

- Continue the Texas Department of Criminal Justice and Texas Board of Criminal Justice for 12 years.
- Direct TDCJ to eliminate the Private Facility Contract Monitoring and Oversight Division and reallocate existing resources elsewhere within the agency."

Thoughts: Why wait another 12 years to review agencies that clearly are full of holes? Dare I say, even a train wreck...?

Whatever you do, don't hire "for profit" prison management companies. Take a look at Dawson State Jail in Dallas, for example. While I understand the allure of using a for-profit prison management company in that it checks a lot of boxes and takes some problems off your plate, it creates even more by way of favoritism and lobbying. I have stories from Dawson State Jail that would curl your toes! We can do better. Let's be smarter - for the safety of our community.

In summary, clearly, TDCJ needs to be run as a company, not a state agency, because running it as a state agency has created a plethora of problems that obviously only create more problems. The department needs a fresh rebranding with proven corporate thought leaders. These thought leaders will bring in forward-thinking ideas, black-and-white perspectives and previously unconsidered solutions. Yes, they will rock a few boats and ruffle a few feathers, but that's the point. Further, my opinion is to initiate a group (committee, if you will) of psychologists, including one or 2 criminal and the rest non-criminal, to generate their own recommendations on how to handle issues such as mental health in prison, how the parole board can better determine timing in paroling an offender, and initiatives to sustain and

improve CO's and staff employees mental health. Really, the psychologists need to be given carte blanche to recommend anything across the board. Lastly, but equally important, I would evaluate the spiritual side in terms of how many church groups are going in? Can we get more? A prayer initiative among these groups and the inmates would go a long way toward improving the atmosphere both at the staff and inmate levels.

Thank you for all you do!

Warm regards,
ANONYMOUS