

From: [Sunset Advisory Commission](#)
To: [Janet Wood](#)
Subject: FW: Additional comments
Date: Monday, September 30, 2024 8:46:25 AM

From:
Sent: Saturday, September 28, 2024 5:22 PM
To: Sunset Advisory Commission <sunset@sunset.texas.gov>
Subject: Additional comments

Sir below are my additional comments and suggestions.

Kind regards,
Rethon E. Sykes (Mrs.)

Sunset Staff Issues and Recommendations:

Issue 1 (AGREE AND would add)

A Changing Workforce and inmate Population Make Multiple TDCJ Facilities Almost Impossible to Adequately Staff.

Per your Executive Summary: “Texas’ Prisons are located in places where hiring sufficient correctional staff is nearly impossible....the agency has not done enough to mitigate this problem.”

Why is TDCJ reopening this unit? Is the unit in need of repairs, and is it air-conditioned? Can it be fully staffed? Please see the census information below:

The current population of Bartlett, Texas is 1,611 based on projections from the US Census estimated (release May 2024). The last official Census in 2020 recorded the population of 1,631.

- 900 White
- Other race 271
- Black or African American 163
- Two or more races 136
- Native American 25 (World Population Review)

“TDCJ News

TDCJ and City of Bartlett Announce Reopening of Bartlett Unit

The Texas Department of Criminal Justice (TDCJ) and the city of Bartlett in Williamson County are pleased to announce the reopening of the Bartlett Unit, formerly known as Bartlett State Jail.

The decision to reactivate the facility stems from a rise in prison population and the need for additional beds. Mothballed in 2017 due to a declining inmate population, the Bartlett Unit will once again play a role in the state's criminal justice system.

“This reopening is positive for both TDCJ and the city of Bartlett,” TDCJ Executive Director Bryan Collier said. “The Bartlett Unit will not only enhance public safety by providing secure housing for inmates but also contribute to the economic growth of the community.”

The Bartlett Unit will have a capacity of 1,049 inmates and is set to operate as an innovation unit for the agency. It will offer a new approach to programs and services designed to support successful rehabilitation and reintegration into society upon release.

Additionally, the facility’s reopening is expected to generate benefits for Bartlett, including the creation of new jobs.

“The Bartlett Unit opening will bring a significant boost to our local economy by offering much-needed jobs, from corrections officers to support staff,” City of Bartlett Mayor Chad Mees said.

The Bartlett Unit is hosting a hiring event that will take place on the unit July 23, 2024, and July 24, 2024, at 1018 Arnold Dr., Bartlett, Texas. The unit’s projected opening date is early October 2024.”

Issue 2 (AGREE and would add)

TDCJ’s Policies and Practices Contribute to and Inadequately Address Its Staffing Crisis. (AGREE and would add the following):

Staffing should reflect all ethnicities. According to your report for TDCJ, the Hispanic civilian workforce has consistently fallen below the statewide percentages in every category (Administration, Professional, Technical, Administrative Support, and Service/Maintenance) over the last three fiscal years. This is unacceptable, especially considering that the prison population houses over a third of Hispanic offenders (Texas Department of Criminal Justice Fiscal Year 2023 Statistical Report). It seems that Issues One and Two are connected."

Issue 3 (AGREE and would add)

Uncoordinated Strategic Planning and Outdated Data Systems and Practices Hinder TDCJ from Effectively Modernizing to Address Technology and Staffing Challenges.

After introducing tablets to the offender population, the paper-based I-60 form should no longer be used. The tablets can be programmed to handle offender requests, connect to the commissary for ordering, schedule all appointments, and perform other necessary functions. The tablets' connectivity to various internal processes will reduce the volume of staff currently being used for these purposes.

Issue 4 (AGREE and would add)

The State Lacks Sufficient Oversight and Strategic Planning for Inmate Rehabilitation Programs.

Per Background Sunset Advisory Commission, The Legislature altered the mission of the Texas Department of Criminal Justice (TDCJ) to eliminate any mention of punishment and instead directed TDCJ to promote positive change in inmate behavior through rehabilitation and reintegration efforts. 'As reflected in this revised mission, MOST INMATES DO NOT SERVE LIFE SENTENCES AND INSTEAD RETURN TO THE COMMUNITY AFTER A FINITE PERIOD OF TIME'. The Board of Pardons and Paroles (BPP) ultimately decides whether an inmate is sufficiently rehabilitated to release, but TDCJ is responsible for rehabilitating and preparing inmates to safely and successfully reenter those communities.

Moreover, "The 2006 Sunset review of TDCJ could not adequately address inmate rehabilitation needs and achieve cost-saving recidivism reduction outcomes without a significant investment by the state in rehabilitation and reintegration mission is primarily carried by three entities: TDCJ's Rehabilitation Programs Division (RPD) and Reentry and Integration Division (RID), and Windham School District."

I have personal experience with the issue you mentioned. The Individualized Treatment Plan (ITP) is not being reviewed or utilized by TDCJ's Rehabilitation and Reentry Division or Windham Schools. Additionally, the ITP is not examined by the Board of Pardons and Paroles. To address this, I reached out to the Regional Chaplain, Ed Flemings, to request his assistance in establishing faith-based programs. I also connected with various volunteers who work within the units, such as the coordinator for the Bridges to Life program. Additionally, I contacted Ms. Ashley Boyd, the TDCJ Prison Fellowship Academy Coordinator, and with her helpful assistance, it took several months to enroll him in this program.

Overall, TDCJ personnel should work with each offender to ensure rehabilitation programs align with their individualized treatment program. In addition, they should assist in initiating and making offenders aware of available programs.

Issue 5 (Agree)

Critical Statutory and Structural Deficiencies Strain an Already Overextended Parole System, Creating Unnecessary Barriers to Effective Supervision.

Issue 6 (Agree and I would add)

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

It can be a daunting responsibility to review and adjudicate parole requests that determine the future of our fellow man. It may be impossible to predict if someone has been rehabilitated and can successfully reintegrate into society. However, as family members, we are left scratching our heads when we continue to see the same denial codes each year. Is there any consideration for providing meaningful denial codes? The repetitive and discouraging nature of the same denial codes is concerning. How can an offender who is currently incarcerated and serving over thirty (30) years be denied parole using the same code they see year after year? People can change, and I am reminded of the following: "America is a nation of second chances. America was founded on fresh starts, new possibilities, and the belief that every person deserves to be treated with dignity and respect." This paragraph is taken from a Fact Sheet (White House Proclamation) designating April as "Second Chance Month."

I am also concerned that the Institutional Parole Officers (IPO) often do not have time to review and make meaningful recommendations to BPP. I believe that it would be beneficial for offenders to be provided, by BPP, with the things that they need to do to help them make parole. For the past three years, I have told my family member that they did not make parole. Normally, the TDCJ website is updated with this information, and the offender is the last to know.

Issue 7 (Agree)

The State Has a Continuing Need for the Texas Department of Criminal Justice

We, fully support the Texas Department of Criminal Justice's mission statement, "to provide public safety, promote positive change in Offender behavior, reintegrate Offenders into society, and assist victims of crime." We must work together to bring about change. As family members, we are doing our part. We trust that TDCJ, BPP, and Windham School are doing theirs. We understand that some offenders will never be granted parole. We must partner together to effect change.

Issue 8 (Agree and would add)

Texas Criminal Justice Entities Statues and Processes Do Not Reflect Some Standard Element of Sunset Reviews.

Regarding the section "Windham at a Glance" under Key Facts, there is a bullet point about Windham Students. The question is whether offenders can apply to Windham School to obtain their high school diploma even if they are outside the age requirements. If they are not considered for acceptance, isn't this **age discrimination**?



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