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TDCJ helps secure state-issued IDs to aid offender reintegration

Offenders released from the Texas Department of Criminal Justice (TDCJ) face many barriers as they reestablish themselves in the community. Securing a job and a place to stay can prove insurmountable to a newly released offender. To make that transition easier, the TDCJ Reentry and Integration Division (RID) has begun securing state-issued identification cards for offenders before they leave confinement.

Providing releasing offenders with state-issued identification is a collaborative effort between TDCJ, the Department of State Health Services (DSHS) and the Texas Department of Public Safety (DPS). The goal is for every eligible offender to leave TDCJ incarceration with a valid birth certificate, a Social Security card and a state-issued identification card in hand.

"Historically, when an offender was released from prison, they would have to secure these documents themselves," explained RID Director April Zamora. It could take up to thirty days from release for an ex-offender to receive the documentation required to become

employed. "When someone walks out of here with an identification card, it gives them immediate access to employment and housing. It's a huge advantage and another component to a successful reintegration."

Texas DSHS office. With these documents in hand, DPS can issue a state ID card. All costs are paid by TDCJ through general revenue funding. Applying early for these documents ensures plenty of time to resubmit the application if information is missing or incorrect.



Reentry case manager David Romero obtains an offender's photo and signature so he can be issued a state identification card upon release.

With the proper personal information and family history, Social Security cards can be obtained through the Social Security Administration and birth certificates through the

The program is voluntary and offenders will occasionally decline help, usually because they believe family members already have these documents at home. In these instances,

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es, case managers can contact family in order to secure copies for the offender's use.

The collaboration between TDCJ and DPS to issue offenders' state identification cards will involve every case manager office being equipped with a DPS-style camera and special computer hardware and software. Soon, 139 CID and Parole offices will be properly equipped and able to process ID's for eligible offenders. To be eligible to receive an ID card, offenders must be a Texas resident with no felony or Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) detainers.

The first prison offender to be issued an identification card was released on February 24 and more than 400 IDs have been

processed for offenders who have been or are scheduled to be released through June 1. Plans are already being developed to reach other TDCJ offender populations, including those sentenced to Substance Abuse Felony Punishment Facility programs. Zamora explains, "These offenders are usually in these programs short term, from six to nine months, but are returning to the community on probation with the same needs as any other offender."

In fiscal year (FY) 2013, 21,795 Social Security cards and 9,975 birth certificates were processed for releasing offenders. The goal for FY 2014 is for 60,000 releasing offenders to depart with these two documents and a state-issued identification card.

Ensuring the successful reentry and reintegration of offenders has always been a vital part of TDCJ's mission and this program is just another tool designed to see that offenders are given every opportunity to thrive as a successful member of society. Speaking about the program, TDCJ Correctional Institutions Division Director Bill Stephens said, "The success of this program is a great accomplishment for all parties involved. By providing these documents to offenders, we remove a significant obstacle to reintegration." ●