



An employee publication of the  
Texas Department of Criminal Justice

March/April 2014

Volume 21 Issue 4

## Agency News

# TDCJ maintains commitment to operating safe prisons, eliminating prison rape

*Brad Livingston, Executive Director*

Citing concerns with several requirements affecting state prisons and local jails, Governor Rick Perry recently did not certify Texas' compliance with national standards governing sexual assault in correctional facilities. One issue identified by the Governor, limitations on cross-gender supervision of offenders by correctional staff, would have a significant operational impact on the Texas Department of Criminal Justice (TDCJ). Approximately 40 percent of TDCJ correctional officers are female, and their ability to provide security in male institutions would be compromised by restrictions designed to enhance offender privacy.

While there is disagreement regarding a few standards, the intent of the Prison Rape Elimination Act (PREA) standards, to prevent in-prison sexual assault and other forms of sexual abuse, reflects a nationwide

consensus shared by Texas policymakers and agency officials. In announcing his decision, Governor Perry was adamant that sexual as-



sault in correctional facilities is unacceptable and that all reasonable steps must be taken to prevent it. Governor Perry, the Texas Legislature, the Board of Criminal Justice, the Office of Inspector General, the PREA ombudsman and this agency all remain absolutely committed to a zero-tolerance policy. The state's commitment predates the enactment of PREA legislation and continues irrespective of any national standards.

Although the federal standards may not be binding upon Texas, the vast majority of PREA standards reflect sound correctional practices that were already incorporated in TDCJ's policies and procedures. The agency has also modified certain policies or procedures in response to those standards, and continues to revise others. Regrettably, the standard relating to cross-gender supervision cannot be implemented without negatively impacting the safety of both staff and offenders.

Your continued efforts to enforce the agency's zero-tolerance policy relating to sexual assault and sexual abuse are deeply appreciated. Thank you for your public service. ●