

TEXAS DEPARTMENT OF CRIMINAL JUSTICE

Biennial Reentry and Reintegration Services Report



Prepared By

**Texas Department of Criminal Justice
Reentry and Integration Division**

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Introduction

This report contains an evaluation of data and a summary of activities completed since September 2016 for the Reentry and Integration Division of the Texas Department of Criminal Justice (TDCJ). As demonstrated throughout this report, the Reentry and Integration Division has continued to grow and adopt practices which ensure effective service delivery for offenders returning to the community following incarceration. However, it should be noted that many other reentry-related programs administered by other divisions within the TDCJ and the Windham School District also contribute to reduced recidivism. While this report provides an overview of particular accomplishments and enhancements relative to reentry, the Reentry and Integration Division has multiple functions which contribute to successful reentry and are delineated in other reports, to include the yearly report on reentry and parole referral required by Government Code 501.103 as well as the biennial report submitted by the Texas Correctional Office on Offenders with Medical or Mental Impairments (TCOOMMI) in January of odd numbered years in accordance with Health and Safety Code 614.009.

During the 85th Legislature state policymakers continued to demonstrate commitment to enhancing both state and local level reentry practices. Policy initiatives enhanced the development of a comprehensive reentry process designed to eliminate reentry barriers and achieve the goals of increased public safety and reduced recidivism. Measures taken by the Legislature enabled the TDCJ to further implement evidence based practices to assess criminogenic risk and needs, and apply that information to develop effective, individualized plans for return to the community. As a result, there were numerous accomplishments, including:

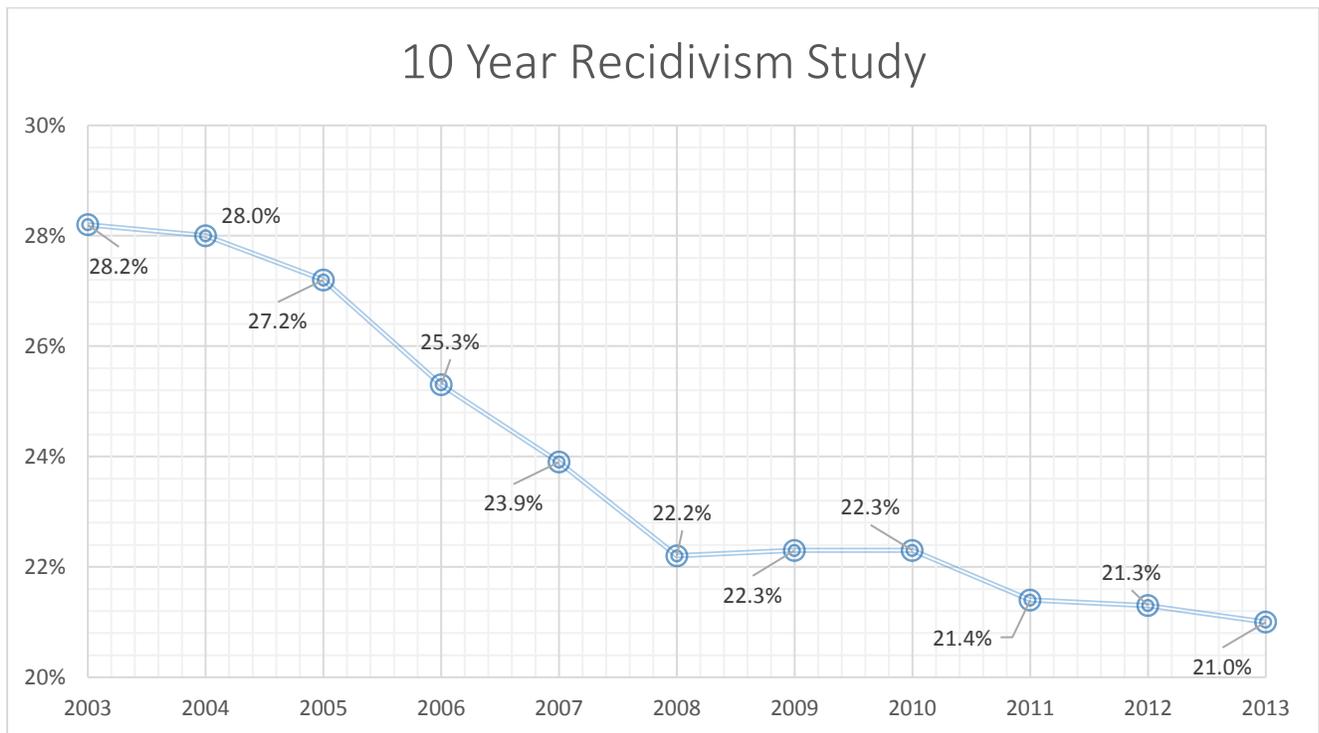
- Expansion of the Special Needs Reentry Program to include 10 pre-release special needs case managers and 5 post-release human service specialists;
- Continued implementation of a Special Needs Reentry Program to supplement the existing continuity-of-care programs;
- Implementation of the true name process to increase the number of offenders approved for a Texas ID; Continued engagement with the Reentry Task Force;
- Initiation of re-certification for the Texas Risk Assessment System end users as well as certification of trainers and end users in use of the assessment tool;
- Acquisition of the offender release processing unit to include 8 additional case manager positions dedicated to releasing. All offender releases from Correctional Institutions Division units are conducted by case managers;
- Automation to better identify eligible offenders for all phases of the Reentry Program;

- Implementation of the “Website for Work” initiative to link employers with skilled offenders releasing to the community;
- Improved tracking and security accountability related to offender identification documents;
- Enhanced collaboration for mental illness and intellectual disability care and outcomes tracking;
- Enhanced veterans reentry services; and
- Facilitated collaboration amongst various TDCJ divisions and the Windham School District to improve post-release offender employment opportunities.

These implementation activities, along with other initiatives, are discussed in detail throughout the remainder of this report.

Recidivism

The ultimate goal of the TDCJ’s reentry program is reduced recidivism. Recidivism rates for the TDCJ offender population continue to be among the lowest in the country with the current overall recidivism rate at 21.0%. See chart below.



Source: Legislative Budget Board

Offender Demographics

Throughout Texas, over a million offenders are processed in local jails each year, many of whom transition to the TDCJ supervision. As of June 30, 2018, a combined total of approximately 459,891 individuals were on probation, parole, or in prison.

- 230,577 on direct misdemeanor or felony probation;
- 145,119 incarcerated in the TDCJ facilities; and
- 84,195 on parole supervision.

In considering the demographics of the offender population, it is important to also consider those impacted beyond each individual offender. The offender population represents families, communities, and victims from every segment of the state's demographics who must also be served in order for reentry initiatives to realize success. Thus, those affected demographics go far beyond persons under the TDCJ supervision.

While the numbers alone are staggering, the challenge is magnified by the sizeable geographical area within the state of Texas. It is with those challenges in mind that the continued engagement by TDCJ with state and local partners, as well as the development and implementation of internal initiatives, provides significant momentum toward a seamless system where all components work in tandem to achieve the ultimate goal of reduced recidivism.

Reentry Task Force Membership

The statewide Reentry Task Force continues to provide a conduit for state and local stakeholders to address reentry practices and provide recommendations for continued enhancement of reentry services across the state. The Reentry Task Force maintained a membership of 29 individuals representing a cross-section of Texas agencies, organizations, and communities:

Texas Juvenile Justice Department	Texas District and County Attorneys Association
Texas Workforce Commission	Texas Conference of Urban Counties
Texas Department of Public Safety	Criminal Justice Coordinator, Urban County
Texas Department of Housing and Community Affairs	Reentry Coordinator, Urban County
TCOOMMI Advisory Committee	Urban County Representative
Health and Human Services Commission	Urban County Commissioner
Texas Judicial Council	Rural County Judge
Texas Board of Pardons and Paroles	Rural County Commissioner
Windham School District	Texas Inmate Family Association
Texas Commission on Jail Standards	Texas Criminal Justice Coalition
Department of State Health Services	Texas Department of Family and Protective Services
Texas Court of Criminal Appeals	Office of Court Administration
County Judges and Commissioners Association of Texas	Texas Department of Criminal Justice
Sheriff's Association of Texas	Texas Veterans Commission
	Faith-Based Volunteer

Reentry Task Force Working Groups

The Reentry Task Force maintains working groups to address specific barriers to successful reentry. Each group is tasked with developing recommendations to address all gaps and barriers identified. Working groups include:

- Housing Working Group: goals include identifying existing housing initiatives that provide services to the formerly incarcerated as well as model housing initiatives or efforts currently in operation in Texas communities.
- Employment Working Group: goals include identifying strategies to eliminate barriers to employment in a post release environment as well as coordination of resources, job training and assistance.
- Coming Home Grant Working Group: to be implemented in the next fiscal year. Goals include identifying strategies to assist probation and parole special needs offenders in the Substance Abuse Felony Punishment Facilities (SAFPF) and post release continuity of care upon transition to the substance abuse residential treatment center.

Through implementation of previous recommendations, as well as the body of work produced by the Reentry Task Force throughout the current biennium, the Reentry and Integration Division, alongside agency leadership, has created, expanded and refined reentry service delivery systems.

Texas Risk Assessment System

Reentry Program Supervisors continue to complete certification as Texas Risk Assessment System (TRAS) Trainers and become qualified to train reentry case managers as certified end users of the assessment tool. Newly hired reentry case managers were trained and certified in the use of the TRAS, ensuring the TRAS is administered appropriately and provides an accurate risk level when administered to TDCJ offenders.

Existing TRAS users must become re-certified prior to their three year certification anniversary. A TRAS re-certification training program was implemented during the biennium and automated by the TDCJ Information Technology Division to provide an efficient means for those initially certified to become re-certified. Pre-release reentry case managers work with the offender to identify problem areas, goals, action steps, and community resources to aid in the offender's success upon release from TDCJ. The case plan transitions to both the supervising parole office and the community case manager post-release, providing continuity in the offender's transition from prison to community.

Enhancement to Birth Certificate and DPS Identification Card Ordering Process

The Reentry and Integration Division has continued efforts to expand the population receiving a certified birth certificate and a DPS identification card. TDCJ's contract with the Department of State Health Services continues to support that effort by providing a process for obtaining a Texas birth certificate for offenders unable to physically appear in a reentry case manager's office to participate in the electronic ordering process. Additionally, a Request for Proposal (RFP) for a program that will purchase birth certificates for offenders born out-of-state at no cost to the offender has been processed. Bidding solicitation for this program was announced late in the biennium. Once implemented, it will result in an increase of applications for a Texas Identification card to the Texas Department of Public Safety (DPS). The Reentry and Integration Division continues to work with the Texas DPS to identify opportunities to increase the number of offenders approved for a Texas Identification card. The Reentry and Integration Division, in cooperation with DPS, implemented a process to address the volume of applications that are rejected due to name discrepancies between the certified birth certificate and the TDCJ offender ID card. That process allows TDCJ to modify the offender ID card to include the offender's birth name. Since implementation, the modification to the offender ID card has resulted in a significant decrease in name-related rejections by the Texas DPS.

Reentry Program

During the current biennium, the reentry program operated with 197 allocated positions providing pre-release and post-release reentry services across the state; 128 pre-release, 8 release dedicated, and 51 post-release case managers. Case managers are located in correctional facilities, district parole offices, and community residential facilities (halfway houses). The remaining 10 positions are dedicated to serving the special needs offender population. These positions are assigned to TDCJ units where offenders with serious medical or mental health needs are housed and complement the existing unit based pre-release case managers who are responsible for ensuring identification documents are secured in addition to the completion of the risk assessment and associated case planning prior to an offender's release from TDCJ facilities.

Pre-Release Reentry Services

Pre-release reentry services include Phase I and II of a three phased Reentry Program. During Phase I, a reentry case manager assists eligible offenders in ordering identification documents prior to release, including a replacement Social Security card, certified birth certificate, military service record (DD-214), and DPS identification card. All identification documents obtained for an offender are issued to him/her at the time of release from TDCJ. These documents equip the offender with the identification information necessary to secure employment, housing, benefits and other services upon return to the community. During Phase II, the reentry case manager conducts a risk assessment for parole approved offenders to determine risk level as it relates to criminogenic need and risk of re-offending. Those that score moderate or high risk on the assessment are enrolled in individualized case planning. While case planning, the case manager and the offender work together to develop an individualized case plan that addresses the offender's needs, sets goals, lists action steps and identifies resources targeted toward equipping the offender for a successful return to the community.

Special Needs Case Management

Through coordinated efforts to ensure post-release continuity of care planning, special needs case managers work directly with unit medical staff, human services specialists, community resources, and the offenders and their families. In addition, pre-release benefit applications are submitted for those offenders who have severe and persistent illness to minimize delay in receiving eligible entitlements.

Post Release Reentry Services

Phase III community based reentry services provide employment preparation classes, assistance in obtaining housing, as well as other basic necessities and provides linkage with other community resources. Reentry staff also coordinate job fairs and hiring events for unemployed and underemployed offenders, providing an opportunity for a potential employer to meet with an offender, take an application on site and offer employment with the advance knowledge of the offender's status with the criminal justice system. The Reentry and Integration Division has worked in close collaboration with other TDCJ divisions and Windham School District to improve post release offender employment by providing opportunities to obtain vocational certificates and on-the-job certifications to aid in job placement post release.

Through the automation and enhancement of referral reports, identification of unemployed offenders and their employment skills has enhanced case management and reduced unemployment during this report period.

Summary of Services Provided

For the period of September 2016 through August 2018, reentry case managers increased numbers from the prior biennium by completing 73,257 applications for birth certificates. Of those, 67,701 birth certificate requests were submitted to the Texas Department of State Health Services and 5,556 were submitted out of state. Case managers also submitted 82,538 applications for social security cards to the Social Security Administration and processed 66,423 offenders for Texas Department of Public Safety identification cards. 208,044 documents (birth certificates, social security cards, military service records, or DPS identification cards) were sent to TDCJ units or parole offices for delivery to offenders.

In addition to pre- and post-release case management provided by the Reentry and Integration Division during the reporting period, resource guides are available at various locations throughout the TDCJ's correctional facilities. A toll-free reentry hotline number is also provided which allows offenders to contact the Reentry and Integration Division for additional assistance and referrals post-release. Reentry case managers assessed 45,052 offenders utilizing the TRAS as part of the parole review process, with 32,848 of those assessed scoring moderate to high in risk. Of those offenders scoring moderate to high in risk, a total of 27,173 were enrolled in pre-release case management services with 5,301 not enrolled due to on-going treatment programming.

As a continuation of the case management program, reentry case managers enrolled 15,001 offenders in post-release case management and provided employment services to an additional 24,891 not enrolled in case management services. Further, 40,163 attended employment readiness classes facilitated by reentry case managers, and 108,087 individual referrals were provided for employment, housing, continuing education and skills training, clothing, food, transportation and other social service needs.

Additional reentry efforts were made by post-release case management during the report period to decrease unemployment rates, this included the coordination of 22 job fairs statewide with approximately 1,298 unemployed or underemployed offenders attending.

Veterans Reentry Services

The TDCJ and the Veterans Administration (VA) maintain an agreement for verification of veteran information through an electronic file transfer utilizing the Veteran Reentry Search Service (VRSS). Using this data, veterans nearing release are identified at which time the Reentry Veterans Services Coordinator notifies the Veterans Integrated Service Network and Military Veteran Peer Network (MVPN) staff as well as reentry case manager to initiate the benefit application process prior to release. The reentry case manager will also discuss eligibility requirements, possible enrollment into the VA health care system and assist veterans in completing the benefits application packet. Case managers also provide offenders' information regarding Hazelwood Act benefits, contact information for the MVPN representative and Texas Veterans Commission county service officer for the area where the offender plans to reside upon release. Medical provider information from the VA website is furnished and post release appointments with the VA for medical continuity of care are initiated, as needed.

Through a partnership with the Samaritan Center, veteran offenders are assessed and, if selected, enrolled in the reentry dorm program at the Travis State Jail. An approved veteran specific program curriculum provides a peer support model program designed to prepare veterans for successful reentry into the community following incarceration.

Reentry Initiatives

Beyond the implementation steps described thus far and their benefit to the state's reentry efforts, growth and development of the reentry program was demonstrated through numerous other endeavors throughout the biennium including:

1. The launch of Website for Work, a web based application managed by a dedicated employment specialist to connect unemployed or underemployed offenders who have specific skills and certifications that meet the employer's needs.
2. Implementation of two grant funded programs that will collectively target offenders housed in state parole halfway houses to determine success rates based on average length of stay in the halfway house and an associated reduction in recidivism. A process was implemented for tracking specific documents issued to each offender at the time of release, providing a mechanism for trend analysis and reporting of related data.
3. Continued to expand reentry case manager involvement in release processing duties on prison units, including state jails, to further enhance continuity in offender transition from pre- to post-release reentry services.
4. Continued coordination with Windham School District, Manufacturing, Agribusiness and Logistics Division, and Parole Division to improve post-release employment opportunities for offenders through evaluation of pre-release training and certification and engagement with employers offering those job opportunities.
5. Application for a grant through the Department of Justice for the development of a program, in collaboration with the Reentry Task Force, to identify strengths and gaps in the current reentry program with the goal of enhancing existing programs and services leading to a reduction in recidivism and improvement in employability.

Looking Forward

The implementation steps and initiatives detailed thus far - additional staff, increasing the number of offenders who receive a DPS ID card, expansion of the community component and the addition of the special needs reentry component, in addition to a list of other activities mark significant growth and development of the reentry program. That momentum will continue with the following planned for the immediate future:

- Coordinate with Agency partners and DPS to reduce the number of offenders denied a DPS ID due to name related discrepancies.
- Implement an expedited process by which the agency submits certified birth certificate applications for offenders born in a state other than Texas.
- Coordinate with Information Technology Division to improve tracking and oversight of Reentry Program components.
- Coordinate with TDCJ departments to ensure release processes enhance the goal of a seamless reentry system.
- Implement a pilot project to allow DPS ID ordering at state parole halfway houses.
- Enhance the process used to identify offenders with Commercial Drivers Licenses and connect them with employers facing a statewide demand for more drivers.
- Coordinate an employment program for employment to target offenders released to a transitional substance abuse program.

Conclusion

The significant progress realized since the inception of the Reentry and Integration Division in September 2009 continued throughout this biennium. The TDCJ has continued to increase the number of offenders served through each component of the pre- and post-release reentry programs. Collaboration among partner agencies and organizations continue to increase, aiding in attaining the goal of a seamless system that prepares and equips the offender for success upon return to the community. As the next steps articulated in this report are accomplished, the TDCJ will remain mindful that, while there have been many significant accomplishments, the work is not complete. Collaborative efforts with agency partners as well as local and state level partnerships will continue to ensure success for each individual offender, with the focus on the continued reduction of recidivism in Texas.