

# 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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# TEXAS DEPARTMENT OF CRIMINAL JUSTICE

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# Table of Contents

Introduction .....	4
Recidivism .....	5
Offender Demographics .....	5
Reentry Task Force Membership .....	6
Reentry Task Force Working Groups .....	7
Texas Risk Assessment System .....	7
Birth Certificate and DPS Identification Card Ordering Process .....	7
Reentry Program .....	8
Pre-Release Reentry Services .....	8
Special Needs Case Management .....	8
Post Release Reentry Services .....	8
Summary of Services Provided .....	9
Offender Employment Initiatives .....	9
Veterans Reentry Services .....	10
Reentry Initiatives .....	10
Looking Forward .....	11
Conclusion .....	11

## Introduction

This report contains an evaluation of data and a summary of activities completed since September 2018 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.

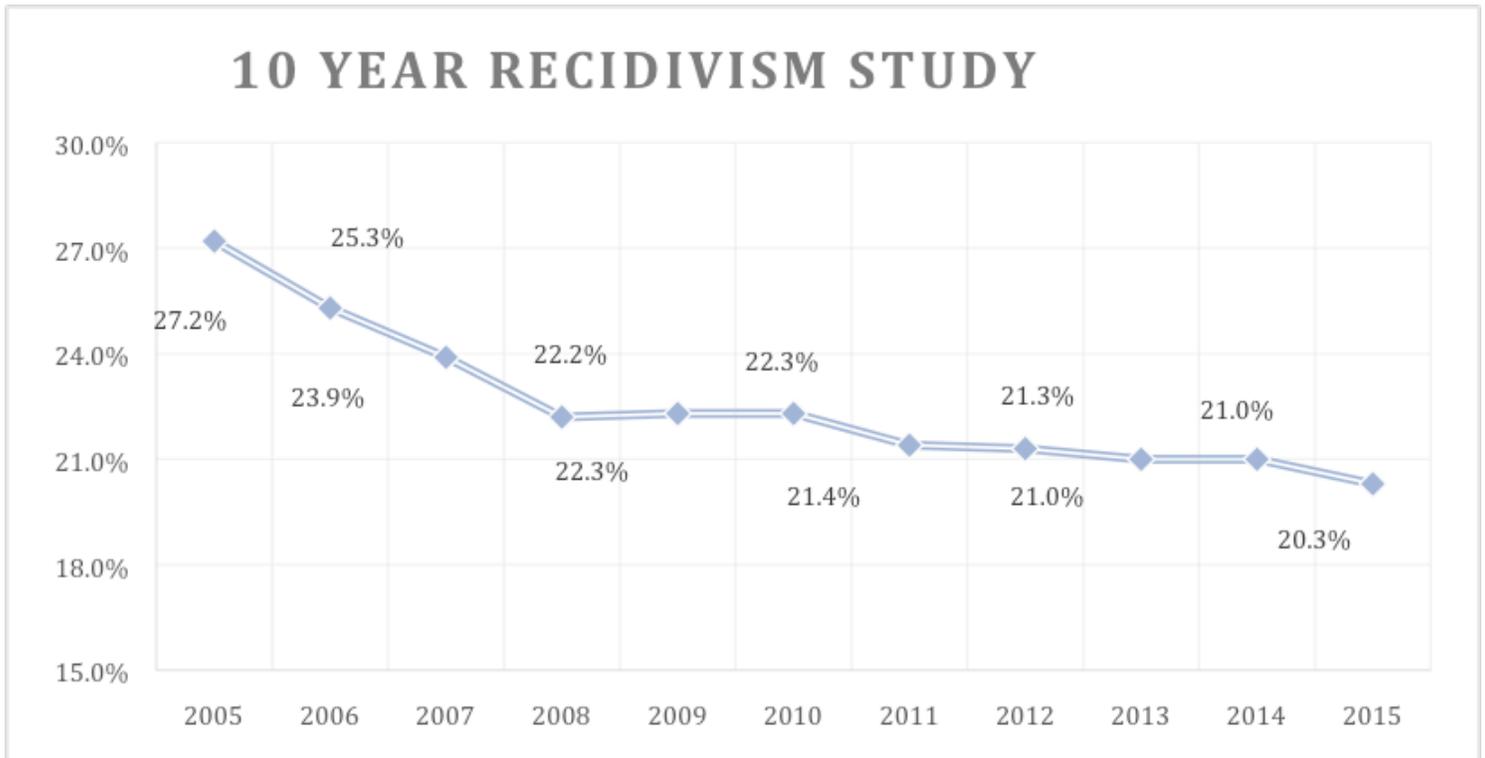
During the 86th Legislature state policymakers again demonstrated a commitment to enhancing both state and local level reentry practices. Policy initiatives enhanced the development of a comprehensive reentry process designed to eliminate reentry barriers and achieve the goals of increased public safety and reduced recidivism. Measures taken by the Legislature enabled the TDCJ to continue to utilize evidence-based practices to assess criminogenic risk and needs, and develop effective, individualized plans for return to the community based on that information. As a result, there were numerous accomplishments, including:

- ◆ Continued implementation of a Special Needs Reentry Program to supplement the existing continuity-of-care programs;
- ◆ Continued engagement with the Reentry Task Force;
- ◆ On-going certification and re-certification for the Texas Risk Assessment System end users as well as certification of trainers in use of the assessment tool;
- ◆ Processing of all offender releases from individual Correctional Institutions Division units by case managers to ensure seamless reentry services;
- ◆ Expansion of the “Website for Work” services that link employers with skilled offenders releasing to the community;
- ◆ Improved tracking and security accountability related to offender identification documents;
- ◆ Effective collaboration for mental illness and intellectual disability care and outcomes tracking;
- ◆ Sustained multi-agency approach to strengthening existing veterans reentry services; and
- ◆ Continued collaboration among 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 20.3%. 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, 2020, a combined total of approximately 411,629 individuals were on probation, parole, or in prison.

- ◆ 201,120 on direct misdemeanor or felony probation;
- ◆ 126,590 incarcerated in the TDCJ facilities; and
- ◆ 83,423 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.

Although these numbers may be astonishing, 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 the following Texas agencies, organizations, and communities:

**Texas Juvenile Justice Department**  
**Texas Workforce Commission**  
**Texas Department of Public Safety**  
**Texas Department of Housing and Community Affairs**  
**Texas Correctional Office on Offenders with Medical or Mental Impairments**  
**Health and Human Services Commission**  
**Texas Judicial Council**  
**Texas Board of Pardons and Paroles**  
**Windham School District**  
**Texas Commission on Jail Standards**  
**Department of State Health Services**  
**Texas Court of Criminal Appeals**  
**County Judges and Commissioners Association of Texas**  
**Sheriff's Association of Texas**  
**Texas District and County Attorneys Association**  
**Texas Conference of Urban Counties**  
**Criminal Justice Coordinator, Urban County**  
**Reentry Coordinator, Urban County**  
**Urban County Representative**  
**Urban County Commissioner**  
**Rural County Judge**  
**Rural County Commissioner**  
**Texas Inmate Family Association**  
**Texas Criminal Justice Coalition**  
**Texas Department of Family and Protective Services**  
**Office of Court Administration**  
**Texas Department of Criminal Justice**  
**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. This work group was also tasked with assisting with the Mapping the Future grant project to identify gaps in the existing TDCJ reentry system and processes and make recommendations for solutions.

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 have been trained and certified in the use of the TRAS, ensuring the TRAS is administered consistently and appropriately, providing an accurate risk level of the offender.

Existing TRAS users must become re-certified prior to their three-year certification anniversary. An automated TRAS re-certification training program has provided an efficient means for those initially certified to become re-certified. Pre-release reentry case managers work collaboratively with the offender to develop an individualized reentry case plan that addresses 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.

## Birth Certificate and DPS Identification Card Ordering Process

The Reentry and Integration Division has continued efforts to increase the number of offenders within 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, during the biennium, TDCJ began ordering birth certificates for offenders born out-of-state allowing for this segment of the offender population to be able to apply for a Texas Identification card from 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. After implementation of a joint solution between the Reentry and Integration Division and the Texas DPS the volume of applications that are rejected due to name discrepancies between the certified birth certificate and the TDCJ offender ID card has declined significantly as TDCJ now has the ability to modify the offender ID card to include the offender's birth name.

## **Reentry Program**

The reentry program operated through the current biennium 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 a severe and persistent illness to minimize delay in receiving eligible entitlements. Special Needs case managers have completed a total of 1,456 benefit applications from September 2018 to July 2020.

### **Post Release Reentry Services**

Phase III community-based reentry provides a variety of services with a targeted focus on employment. In addition to employment search and job preparation classes, case managers provide assistance in obtaining housing, as well as other basic necessities and provide linkage with other community resources. Reentry staff also coordinate job fairs, career expositions, 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 continues to enhance existing case management practices and reduced unemployment during this report period.

## **Summary of Services Provided**

For the period of September 2018 through July 2020, reentry case managers completed 60,362 applications for birth certificates. Of those, 46,886 birth certificate requests were submitted to the Texas Department of State Health Services and 13,476 were submitted out of state. Case managers also submitted 58,074 applications for social security cards to the Social Security Administration and processed 73,026 offenders for Texas Department of Public Safety identification cards. Over 215,000 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. Although there was an increase in the number of documents provided upon release, there was a reduction in the total number of documents ordered, due to various factors, such as a decline in the offender population, an increase in offenders received at TDCJ with valid identification documents, and an increase in offenders already having documents on file with TDCJ.

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 37,380 offenders utilizing the TRAS as part of the parole review process, with 24,722 of those assessed scoring moderate to high in risk. Of those offenders scoring moderate to high in risk, a total of 20,598 were enrolled in pre-release case management services with 3,114 not enrolled due to on-going treatment programming.

As a continuation of the case management program, reentry case managers enrolled 17,163 offenders in post-release case management and provided employment services to an additional 26,542 not enrolled in case management services. A total of 171,219 referrals were provided for employment, housing, continuing education and skills training, clothing, food, transportation, and other social service needs.

## **Offender Employment Initiatives**

Employment is one of the most important elements of an offender's successful reentry back into the community and the TDCJ has enhanced programming during the reporting period to support the goal of self-sufficiency on the part of the offender. To assist in the preparation for employment, 31,281 offenders attended employment readiness classes facilitated by reentry case managers while Intensive Employment Classes were crafted for those chronically unemployed/underemployed offenders in select locations. Additional reentry efforts were made by post-release case managers to decrease unemployment rates, to include the coordination of 124 job fairs, hiring events and targeted employment events at residential reentry centers, with 4,065 unemployed or underemployed offenders attending and 71.5% obtaining employment.

Similarly, Career Expositions were launched to assist incarcerated offenders wherein employers come to a secure facility, such as a state jail, to provide an overview of their business, careers that are in demand, and provide the opportunity for the offenders to interact with employers

prior to release to further prepare an offender for the workplace. To date, 24 career expos were held with 38.3% of offender attendees subsequently securing employment.

The Strength Through Restoration, Independence, Vision and Empowerment (STRIVE) dorm was launched at the Mountain View Unit to better prepare offenders to meet post-release employment needs with 109 offenders having successfully completed the program. Reentry staff assist the offender in identifying barriers to their reentry and provide referrals, job training, resources, and employment assistance along with continued support post-release. Another integral part of the program is a professional clothing drive which allows the women to dress professionally at career expos with potential employers and the ability to release with appropriate career clothing, shoes, and accessories. In response to the challenges presented by COVID-19, Virtual Career Fairs were introduced as part of the STRIVE dorm program and have provided a successful and meaningful employer/applicant experience with 20 of the 29 participating offenders being offered employment after their scheduled release.

To further develop and enhance relations with potential employers, the Reentry and Integration Division's Website for Work program provides an electronic means for potential employers to link with available skilled offenders through the use of a web based application that can match the employer with an available job to an appropriate offender in the community. There are now over 500 employers that have or are utilizing the program.

As part of the on-going practices and activities already occurring within Reentry programming relative to employment, and in accordance with HB 918 (86th Legislature), a joint effort between the Windham School district and the TDCJ provided for releasing offenders to obtain a resume and practice interviews to enhance job readiness.

## **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 initiatives 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:

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.

Continued to coordinate with the Rehabilitation Programs Division to expand volunteer provided veteran programming on units by increasing the number of programs from 32 to 55 across the state.

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.

Continued to streamline the releasing process through the implementation of electronic bus ticket purchasing which is not only anticipated to reduce time spent in processing tickets but also reduce the cost associated with the process.

Continued coordination with Information Technology Division to improve tracking and oversight of Reentry Program components.

## **Looking Forward**

The implementation steps and initiatives detailed thus far - in addition to a list of other activities mark the ongoing and significant growth of the reentry program. This momentum will continue with the following planned for the immediate future:

- ◆ Coordinate with TDCJ departments to further enhance the goal of a seamless reentry system.
- ◆ Collaborate on the launch of eight additional veterans dorms serving both the prison and state jail populations.
- ◆ Implement a pre-release workbook for use in a reentry case management program for female offenders at select units as part of the Beyond the Walls grant through the Governor's office.

## **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.



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Services Report

*Produced by*

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