



Senate Bill 345 83rd Legislative Session Implementation Guide



S.B. 345 (Whitmire) [SP: Parker]: *Relating to certain programs for inmates, including the abolition of the state boot program and the use of programs by volunteer and faith-based organizations.*

Volunteers in Texas Prisons

The Texas Legislature and the Texas Department of Criminal Justice (TDCJ) have been consistent in their understanding and acceptance of the importance of programming provided by volunteers from community-based organizations. In an attempt to prepare incarcerated individuals for their return to society, Texas law explicitly states that TDCJ will “actively encourage volunteer organizations” to provide a variety of programs, including life and job skills, literacy, and education programs, among others.¹ In addition, with its passage of H.B. 1711, the 81st Legislature ordered TDCJ to seek “support from the community into which an offender is released or discharged, including support from agencies and organizations within that community.”²

According to the TDCJ website, the agency places a “significant focus on volunteer services realizing volunteers are an essential element in the rehabilitation and re-entry of offenders into the community.”³ TDCJ administrators say that they have over 20,000 volunteers; however, a scan of the volunteer initiatives offered by each unit reveals that only four of 111 units offer all eight volunteer initiatives mandated by Texas law.

What does S.B. 345 intend to do?

S.B. 345 directs every warden to identify and actively encourage volunteer and faith-based organizations to provide the programs mandated in Texas Government Code §501.009. (*For a complete list of those programs, see box below.*) The bill further mandates that each warden will submit a report to the Board of Criminal Justice summarizing the programs provided to individuals on his or her unit, and the actions taken by the warden to identify and encourage organizations to provide those programs.

This bill intends to increase volunteer participation on TDCJ units in the hopes that those volunteers can provide programming that the agency cannot due to budgetary and staff restrictions. Each warden knows the needs of the individuals on his or her unit, and those needs can be quite unique and specific. Some units have a large population of wheelchair-bound individuals. Others have a large geriatric population. Some have large numbers of military veterans. Many may have a youthful population and are plagued by racially based violence. Female incarcerated individuals need specific programming that males don’t. In short — each warden is asked to look at the needs of the individuals incarcerated on his or her unit, to see if programming exists to address those needs, and, if not, to seek out community organizations that can come onto the units and offer that programming.

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How can I help implement S.B. 345?

Nonprofit and Faith-Based Organizations

If your organization desires to provide programming on a nearby unit, you will have to get your program approved by the TDCJ Rehabilitation Programs Division. Here are the steps you should take to ensure that happens.

1. Go to the TDCJ website's home page, at <http://tdcj.state.tx.us/>.
2. Under the "Quick Links" section on the right-hand side, click on "Volunteer with the TDCJ." (If for some reason the link doesn't work, go to http://tdcj.state.tx.us/divisions/rpd/rpd_volunteer.html).
3. Scroll down to the "Proposal Form for Service Providers." Fill out the PDF version or the Word version and follow the instructions regarding submission of the form.

Someone at the Rehabilitation Programs Division will evaluate your program. If it is approved, programmatic details will be forwarded to the warden, who will then contact you to make arrangements for you to begin.

There is nothing wrong with contacting the unit, but you will be told to complete the above steps. If you already have a relationship with the warden, there is a possibility that you could come onto the unit and assess its needs and better gauge if your organization truly can offer viable programming to the individuals on that unit. TDCJ allows volunteers to come onto a unit a total of four times before they are required to take volunteer training, so it is possible you can parlay a relationship with a unit warden into the beginnings of a program. But you will still be required to complete the above proposal if the program is to continue, so it is best to do that first.

Programming Mandated by S.B. 345

- Literacy and education programs
- Life skills programs
- Job skills programs
- Parent-training programs
- Drug and alcohol rehabilitation programs
- Support group programs
- Arts and crafts programs
- Other programs determined to aid inmates in the transition between confinement and society and to reduce incidence of recidivism among inmates

Source: Texas Government Code §501.009

¹ Tx. Gov. Code §501.009.

² Tx. Gov. Code §501.092(d)(3).

³ Texas Department of Criminal Justice, Rehabilitative Programs Division, Volunteer Services Program. Available at http://tdcj.state.tx.us/divisions/rpd/rpd_volunteer.html.