



**TEXAS CRIMINAL
JUSTICE COALITION**

Celebrating 20 Years

Building stronger families,
safer communities, and a
brighter future for Texas.

RESPONSE TO INTERIM CHARGE 4

TEXAS HOUSE COMMITTEE ON APPROPRIATIONS S/C ON ARTICLES I, IV, AND V

SUBMITTED BY

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Dear Chairman Longoria and S/C Members:

On behalf of the Texas Criminal Justice Coalition, I am grateful for this opportunity to provide written testimony with respect to Interim Charge 4:

Evaluate funding provided to the Texas Department of Criminal Justice (TDCJ) for the repair, maintenance, and upgrade of prison facilities. Determine areas of the facilities that are in most need of repair, maintenance, or upgrade and examine the costs associated with such repairs, maintenance, or upgrades. Examine the Correctional Managed Health Care Committee's administration of Hepatitis C treatment and procedures. Review the Community Justice Assistance Division's current compliance practices and examine current funding formulas for adult probation departments. Study the TDCJ's ownership of real property not being used for prison facilities, including the amount of property owned and its highest and best use.

I also appreciate your work to conduct important oversight of state agencies during the COVID-19 crisis. This testimony and our recommendation are grounded in research and informed by the ongoing COVID-19 response within Texas prisons, as well as by impending revenue issues that will likely impact the incarcerated population.

The Texas Criminal Justice Coalition is a nonprofit, nonpartisan organization dedicated to researching and advancing policies to safely decrease prison populations while building more effective community-based services to prevent incarceration.

The Need to Prioritize Crime Prevention Over Costly, Aging Facilities

As of August 2020, there were 124,181 people incarcerated in Texas prisons,¹ following a recent population drop of approximately 16,000 people; this is the result of rapidly declining crime rates, decreased felony court activity due to the COVID-19 emergency declaration, and stalled transfer of individuals committed to state prison from county jail.² While this reduction in incarceration seems promising – and is saving the state approximately \$1 million per day³ – the numbers will likely rise again once the pandemic subsides.

Currently, 891 of every 100,000 Texans is incarcerated (either in a state or federal prison, a juvenile facility, or a county jail). This rate of incarceration eclipses the national incarceration rate by 27 percent and dwarfs many other NATO member countries' rates altogether.⁴

Unless the system is downsized and funding is shifted toward programs known to prevent crime, including substance use recovery programs, Texas will be forced to increase funding every year for maintaining its 100+ units, many of which are more than a century old (*see chart*).

TDCJ Unit	Date Established
Clemens	1893
Darrington	1917
Eastham	1917
Goree	1907
Huntsville	1849
Ramsey	1908
Scott	1919
Stringfellow	1908
Vance	1885
Wynne	1883

Recommendation: Rather than allocating additional state dollars to facility costs, we urge the committee to recommend closing aging and under-staffed facilities across the state.

Citations

¹ Legislative Budget Board, *Monthly Tracking of Adult Correctional Population Indicators (August 2020)*, https://www.lbb.state.tx.us/Documents/Publications/Info_Graphic/812_MonthlyReport_Aug.pdf.

² Data obtained through the Office of Court Administration Court Activity Database. Monthly commitments to TDCJ declined by more than 16,000 during the period between March and August 2020 compared to the six-month period prior to the COVID-19 emergency declaration.

³ Legislative Budget Board, *Criminal and Juvenile Justice Uniform Cost Report: Fiscal Years 2017 and 2018*, January 2019, p. 4,

https://www.lbb.state.tx.us/Documents/Publications/Policy_Report/4911_Criminal_Juvenile_Uniform_Cost_Jan_2019.pdf. Calculated by multiplying 16,000 people by \$62.65 [Statewide Cost per day], for a total of \$996,000 per day.

⁴ Prison Policy Initiative, *Texas Profile*, <https://www.prisonpolicy.org/profiles/TX.html>.