

# **[2019 Session] Expand the Use of Reentry Peer Support to Decrease the Likelihood of Re-Offending**

## **Policy Background**

Peer support involves a trained Peer Support Specialist with histories of substance use, mental health conditions, and criminal justice involvement helping those with similar histories. These specialists have achieved a reasonable degree of stability in their own lives and are now employed by local government or nonprofit agencies to provide individualized support to others. Over the past two state legislative sessions, Texas legislators have funded peer support programming that focuses on mental health and substance use. However, recidivism rates are increasing among people transitioning back into the community, specifically from state jails and intermediate sanction facilities,<sup>1</sup> who would benefit from peer support. The Texas Department of Criminal Justice (TDCJ) should increase the use of trained and certified Peer Support Specialists within institutional settings, residential reentry centers, intermediate sanction facilities, parole, in-prison treatment programs, and other correctional settings.

## **Proposed Solution**

Require TDCJ to: (1) establish a policy allowing certified peers, many of whom have criminal backgrounds, to serve within TDCJ facilities; (2) establish relationships with community-based organizations that train and employ certified peers; and (3) establish a policy allowing incarcerated and justice system-involved individuals to seek training and certification as Peer Support Specialists and to serve in that role while still incarcerated – a model similar to the Southwestern Seminary program at the Darrington Unit.

## **Relevant Bill**

- **Bill Number:** [HB 2158](#) [White]  
**Bill Caption:** Relating to the availability of peer support services in facilities operated by or under contract with the Texas Department of Criminal Justice.  
**TCJE Materials:** [Fact Sheet](#)

**House Hearing Notice:** Corrections, March 21, 2019

**TCJE House Action:** Testimony in support

**House Hearing Video:** Corrections, 3/21/19

*Amended to **HB 3227***

## **Other Materials**

- House Committee on Corrections [Interim Report](#) to the 86<sup>th</sup> Texas Legislature [November 2018]

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<sup>1</sup> Legislative Budget Board, *Statewide Criminal and Juvenile Justice Recidivism and Revocation Rates*, January, 2017, 2,  
[http://www.lbb.state.tx.us/Documents/Publications/Policy\\_Report/3138\\_Stwide\\_Crim\\_Just\\_Recid\\_Revoc.pdf](http://www.lbb.state.tx.us/Documents/Publications/Policy_Report/3138_Stwide_Crim_Just_Recid_Revoc.pdf).