



**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**  
May 26, 2015

**CONTACT: Ana Yáñez-Correa, TCJC Executive Director**  
Cell: (512) 587-7010 | [acorrea@TexasCJC.org](mailto:acorrea@TexasCJC.org)

## **CRITICAL SENATE JUVENILE JUSTICE REFORM BILL PASSES TEXAS HOUSE**

***SB 1630, which establishes effective regional approaches to help local juvenile probation departments succeed, is a significant step towards addressing the “unfinished business” of Texas juvenile justice reform***

Austin, Texas—The Texas Criminal Justice Coalition (TCJC) congratulates the Texas House of Representatives for passing SB 1630 earlier today, continuing their effort to improve the state’s once dysfunctional juvenile justice system. SB 1630 represents a fundamental shift in how young people would be served by the justice system by creating a regionalization plan for the Texas Juvenile Justice Department (TJJD). The plan would allow youth to be kept closer to their home communities in lieu of commitment to distant state-secure facilities.

**Senator John Whitmire, chair of the Senate Committee on Criminal Justice, deserves praise for authoring the bill.** Senator Whitmire based his legislation on a recent, first-of-its-kind Council of State Governments (CSG) Justice Center analysis of the success of the 2007 and subsequent reforms to Texas’ juvenile justice system, which showed that placing youth in their communities produces better outcomes than confining youth in state-run facilities. **Representative Sylvester Turner, the House sponsor of the bill, is another longtime champion of juvenile justice reform and must be commended for his commitment to Texas youth.**

The House also passed a series of floor amendments to SB 1630 that increase accountability measures and keep more youth out of the adult corrections system. These amendments include, but are not limited to, the following:

- **Raising the age of maximum juvenile jurisdiction from 17 to 18 years.** Texas teens will be safer, and less likely to reoffend, because they will be served by the juvenile justice system and kept out of the adult system. By making this change, 17-year-olds will have a better shot at success and will likewise be protected from the harms associated with confinement in adult correctional facilities. Further, this amendment will help Texas come into compliance with the federal Prison Rape Elimination Act (PREA), which requires 17-year-olds to be separated from adult inmates in correctional facilities. Governor Greg Abbott recently told the Department of Justice that he intends for Texas to become fully compliant with PREA. Raising the age of juvenile jurisdiction will better facilitate this without requiring Texas Sheriffs to retrofit jail facilities at tremendous expense or be liable for noncompliance. This amendment, put forth by Representatives Gene Wu and Lyle Larson, does not go into effect until September 1, 2017, which provides ample time for TJJD and its partners at the local level to prepare for the policy change. Also importantly, the amendment results in no financial impact to the state or counties for the 2016-2017 biennium; furthermore, a clarifying amendment ensures that funds must be appropriated in order for this amendment to be implemented.

--MORE--

- **Expanding independent oversight and providing more protection for youth placed, post-adjudication, at the local level.** In 2007, the Office of the Independent Ombudsman (OIO) was established as an external advocate for youth and families impacted by the state juvenile system; currently, the OIO’s jurisdiction extends only to those state-level facilities. As Texas has succeeded in its efforts to keep more youth out of large state-run juvenile facilities, additional youth are now being kept in local facilities. The regionalization plan in SB 1630 will certainly continue this trend, while also expanding independent oversight into Texas’ 35 secure local juvenile facilities. This amendment, put forth by Representative Cindy Burkett, extends the OIO’s authority even further by allowing investigations to occur in any non-secure, post-adjudication facility, ensuring that all juvenile justice-involved youth are afforded the same level of protection.
- **Ensuring the proper assessment of youths’ risks and needs to support effective case management.** A risk and needs assessment is a tool primarily used in the fields of criminal and juvenile justice to establish the factors that contribute to an individual’s criminal or delinquent behavior. When used properly, these tools can inform the required level of supervision and the interventions needed to help steer a person away from deviant behavior. Unfortunately, when used inconsistently, these tools can result in ineffective case management, wasting taxpayer dollars while failing to meet the needs of system-involved individuals. This amendment, put forth by Representative Sylvester Turner, addresses this concern by requiring any assessment or process provided to Texas’ 166 local juvenile probation departments to be “validated,” which means it has been statistically proven to work.
- **Moving beyond recidivism as the system’s sole measure of success by looking at outcomes associated with youths’ well-being.** Historically, Texas has measured the success of the juvenile justice system by focusing on the number of youth who reoffend. While recidivism is a definite metric for consideration, it should not be the sole metric for determining a system’s success. Research tells us that the factors contributing to youths’ delinquency go beyond their “criminal history”; specifically, factors including family and school engagement, association with delinquent peers, life skills, and employment all greatly impact the behavior of at-risk youth. Knowing this, we owe it to our youth and to taxpayers to determine whether the services we are providing to youth are in fact addressing their underlying issues. This amendment, put forth by Representative Sylvester Turner, addresses this issue by requiring TJJ to move beyond recidivism and to focus on what truly matters: the multitude of factors that can contribute to a youth’s success.

Dr. Ana Yáñez-Correa, TCJC’s Executive Director, reflected on the House passage of SB 1630: “This is another great step forward for juvenile justice reform. SB 1630 puts into place a regional model that research demonstrates will serve youth better. While Texas’ juvenile system has made great progress since 2007, it continues to have a few areas of unfinished business. As amended by the House, SB 1630 is an effective policy that will allow more youth succeed closer to home, and it will put in place safety and accountability measures to ensure Texas is protecting our youth, our communities, and our tax dollars.”

###

*TCJC works with peers, policy-makers, practitioners, and community members to identify and promote smart justice policies that safely reduce Texas’ costly over-reliance on incarceration – creating stronger families, less taxpayer waste, and safer communities.*