



Caitlin Dunklee, Policy Analyst

Work: (512) 441-8123, ext. 104

Cell: (646) 269-7344

cdunklee@TexasCJC.org

www.TexasCJC.org

TESTIMONY 2013

H.B. 2398

Dear Members of the Committee,

Thank you for allowing me this opportunity to present testimony in favor of H.B. 2398, which calls for a study on visitation practices at state corrections facilities. This is critical given that visitation during incarceration has been demonstrated to boost parent-child interactions and reduce recidivism. Examining current visitation policies will help identify promising practices and create opportunities for replication, for healthier families and long-term public safety gains.

### VISITOR-FRIENDLY POLICIES CAN IMPROVE FAMILY INTERACTION AND HELP REDUCE RECIDIVISM

Hundreds of thousands of Texans have a loved one incarcerated in the Texas Department of Criminal Justice (TDCJ). Visitation policies and practices thus impact many Texans, and directly affect the ability of families to stay connected during incarceration. Visitation plays an important role in maintaining positive connections between incarcerated individuals and their families and friends.<sup>1</sup> **A recent robust study on the effects of prison visitation on recidivism found that visitation can help reduce recidivism by up to 25%.<sup>2</sup>** Furthermore, the study found that “**visitor friendly**” policies “**could yield public safety benefits by helping offenders establish a continuum of social support from prison to the community.**”<sup>3</sup>

It is critical to ensure that visitation policies facilitate safe contact between adults, child-friendly areas, an atmosphere that is conducive to maintaining family relationships, and environments that reduce noise and allow for adequate space.

### KEY FINDINGS

- Visitation during incarceration has been shown to reduce recidivism by up to 25%.<sup>4</sup>
- Denying the parent-child connection can lead to behaviors by youth that can spur involvement with the juvenile justice system.<sup>5</sup> As of 2011, nearly 95,000 individuals incarcerated in Texas prisons self-reported as having children.<sup>6</sup>
- Appropriate play with children in a developmentally appropriate setting positively impacts attachment, increasing the probability of establishing stable, healthy relationships and in turn **contributing to the safety and security of the unit.**<sup>7</sup>

### COST-SAVING AND PUBLIC SAFETY-DRIVEN SOLUTION: SUPPORT H.B. 2398 BY REPRESENTATIVE TURNER

- **H.B. 2398 calls for a study of visitation policies in Texas’ state jails and prisons**, including recommendations for methods to improve these policies and replicate promising practices. Creating visitation environments that are more conducive to safe, healthy interaction can ease incarcerated individuals’ transition process into the community and help keep the family unit strong – a key to successful reintegration.

*Citations on reverse.*

## Citations

---

<sup>1</sup> Texas Department of Criminal Justice, *General Information Guide for Families of Offenders*, December 2012.

<sup>2</sup> Minnesota Department of Corrections, *The Effects of Prison Visitation on Offender Recidivism*, November 2011.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid.

<sup>5</sup> Charlene Wear Simmons, Ph.D., *Children of Incarcerated Parents*, Prepared at the request of Assemblymember Kerry Mazzone, California Research Bureau (CRB) Note Vol. 7, No. 2, March 2000, p. 1; with regards to “children whose parents have been arrested and incarcerated [...] the behavioral consequences can be severe, absent positive intervention – emotional withdrawal, failure in school, delinquency and risk of intergenerational incarceration.”

<sup>6</sup> Data gleaned from a TDCJ information request, 2011; actual number: 94,635. Note additionally: 8,150 inmates in state jails self-reported children, while 2,160 individuals in Substance Abuse Felony Punishment Facilities self-reported children; *information available upon request*.

<sup>7</sup> S. Pollack, “Parent-child connections: The essential component for positive youth development and mental health, safe communities and academic achievement,” *New Directions for Youth Development*, vol. 2004 (103), 2004, pp. 17-30; information also taken from: Perry, B.D. (n.d.) Bonding and Attachment in Maltreated Children: Consequences of emotional neglect in childhood.