

TEXAS CRIMINAL JUSTICE COALITION
PRIORITY RECOMMENDATION FOR THE SUNSET ADVISORY COMMISSION

PAROLEE TRACKING AND OFFICER REPORTING

INTENT – *Ensure that parole officers—using accurate and regularly updated information—achieve their obligation to assist former inmates in reentering the community, specifically by imposing monthly reporting requirements on parole officers and by requiring the Regional and District Parole Offices to submit quarterly reports.*

Individualized Reporting: To facilitate successful reentry and augment recent efforts to improve the reintegration process, parole officers should be required to maintain detailed monthly reports related to each person under their supervision, whether on regular or specialized caseloads. Specifically, parole officers should track and record the following items on a monthly basis: (1) the number of home visits conducted; (2) the number of times the officer has offered referral assistance, per parolee; (3) each housing placement, identifying the parolee’s county of residence and confirming his or her housing placement; (4) any job assistance provided through the parole office, including résumé building or interview skills, and the number of job interviews facilitated on behalf of parolees; (5) each employment placement, including referrals and confirmation of employment; (6) each treatment placement, including referrals and confirmation of placement; (7) the type of medical services and needs that are provided on a monthly basis; (8) any educational assistance or resources provided; (9) the number of individuals outfitted with appropriate clothing and furnished necessities to maintain proper hygiene; (10) methods used to adjust placement based on individual progress, needs, and risks; (11) any other day-to-day necessity furnished by or facilitated through the parole office, or other services provided.

NOTE: This recommendation should not pose undue difficulties for parole officers; maintaining a log that tracks these items should be easily updatable, even on a daily basis.

General Reporting: Parole officers should also do the following: (1) keep and update a monthly list of resources for parolees, including medical, housing, community-based service providers, etc.; (2) create a continually updated list of community members and service providers with whom the parole officer has developed a working relationship; (3) identify and maintain a continually updated list of employers and education providers willing to work with parolees; and (4) track any training the parole officer receives. Any resource information collected, including new working relationships with service providers, should be exchanged with other parole offices and officers.

Data Compilation, Dissemination, and Benefits: The Regional and District Parole Offices should collect parole officers’ individualized and general reports and, in turn, submit a quarterly report, containing a detailed synthesis of the monthly reports, to the state’s Reentry Task Force, the Texas Department of Criminal Justice’s (TDCJ) Reentry and Integration Division, the Governor, the Lieutenant Governor, the Speaker of the House of Representatives, and the standing committees in the Senate and House of Representatives primarily responsible for criminal justice issues.¹ The monthly and quarterly reports should also be made available to the public.

Increasing access to this information will help stakeholders identify gaps in service delivery in various regions, as well as help parole officers track their success in case management and

supervision. It will also help stakeholders identify parole officers who surpass their daily obligations, for recognition by their department or the state.

BACKGROUND

As professionals assigned the duties of risk and needs assessment, supervision, and case management, parole officers are responsible for overseeing and assisting individuals transitioning from a correctional facility into the community.² To achieve successful reentry, departments must collaborate with one another to provide a continuum of services that will prepare individuals for reintegration and continue to support them while they are living in the community. This collaborative approach requires **constant communication and an ongoing exchange of relevant information pertaining to individual needs and available resources**. Proper record-keeping and regular reporting not only creates a culture of accountability, it establishes continuity among divisions, practitioners, and service providers responsible for rehabilitation and reentry.³

Individualized Reporting: The reporting requirements addressed here build on policies already in place, expanding on the information parole officers already track and adding some reporting elements not previously mandated. Currently, parole officers track certain information that supplements preexisting records created while a person is incarcerated. For example, TDCJ develops an electronic file known as the Offender Information Management System (OIMS) for each inmate prior to release.⁴ While this provides some useful information, uniform standards must be established through clear statutory requirements that expressly state how, and with whom, relevant information must be shared, as well as the type of information that must be recorded and reported. Additionally, under Government Code section 508.152, TDCJ is required to create a record of an inmate's progress, detailing previous social history, physical and mental health, employment history, etc., but **clear lines of communication and mandatory information exchange must be established in statute**, including a requirement that information regarding an inmate be transferred in the OIMS and be incorporated into monthly and quarterly parole reports.

Ongoing communication between agencies, parole officers, and service providers is especially critical during an individual's tumultuous transition from a TDCJ institution back into community life. Communication ensures continuity in needed services and creates a continuum of care between institutional and community-based programming and assistance. After an inmate's release, his or her parole officer conducts an initial interview that begins with review of the OIMS documents. According to current policy, the parole officer must update the OIMS with new information, such as whether the person is referred for special conditions or education,⁵ and he or she should periodically update the OIMS to verify counseling and employment, among other things.⁶ However, information collected and updated should be expanded—including educational and employment support provided through the parole office or any basic necessities provided by the parole officer. Moreover, reports completed by parole officers and those compiled by Regional and District Parole Offices should be more comprehensive, submitted more frequently, and made available to the public. Additionally, more support and resources should be accessible to all parolees. Parole officers should take a more active role in seeking out resources and reaching out to parolees to provide assistance. Ultimately, there must be a legitimate measure of accountability in place to ensure that parole officers proactively assist parolees with necessary resources or placements; to achieve this, a comprehensive recording and reporting process should be statutorily imposed. To facilitate accurate information exchange, and to maintain consistent communication between service providers, parole officers, and agency officials, the Legislature must establish comprehensive

monthly reporting requirements for parole officers and require Regional and District Parole Offices to submit quarterly reports to the key stakeholders outlined above.

General Reporting: With respect to data collection related to service providers and resources, minimal requirements such as these are already in place. Through programs like the Parole District Reentry Centers (DRCs), partnerships between institutional officers, parole officers, and the community are fostered to help facilitate reentry.⁷ DRCs create a continuum of care in programming for eligible persons reentering society by providing such things as cognitive intervention, substance abuse education, anger management, and pre-employment preparation classes for unemployed parolees.⁸ DRCs require coordination between TDCJ divisions and community-based service providers to meet a variety of parolee needs. Additionally, the reporting requirements—including the information that must be updated in the OIMS—and accountability measures are fairly robust.⁹ DRCs, however, are limited to specially qualified parolees. Ultimately, establishing relationships and partnering with various service providers, maintaining an updated record of resources, comprehensive recording and reporting, and exchanging information with other officers should be standard practice in all cases.

Project RIO was also a program that partnered parole divisions with community-based resources, through the Texas Workforce Commission, to help releasees obtain employment.¹⁰ Project RIO provided meaningful job support and helped guide parolees in their search for employment. Unfortunately, this program was eliminated with budget cuts, although current policy still indicates that parole officers must complete a Project RIO referral.¹¹ While Project RIO no longer exists, its implementation and function demonstrated how developing relationships, maintaining ongoing communication, and reporting on these community resources can ensure that individuals have access to relevant services and necessary job assistance.

NOTE: Implementation of this recommendation would result in no fiscal impact.

REFERENCES

¹ This is generally consistent with the annual reporting requirements of the Board of Pardons and Paroles under TEX. GOV. CODE § 508.1445 and the reentry recidivism reporting requirements under TEX. GOV. CODE § 501.100.

² Under TEX. GOV. CODE § 508.001(7), a parole officer is a person “assigned the duties of assessment of risks and needs, investigation, case management, and supervision of releasees...”

³ In most cases, statistical information relating to the parole system, including data collected on individuals served, is not confidential and must be available for public inspection, *see* TEX. GOV. CODE § 508.313.

⁴ *See e.g.*, Texas Department of Criminal Justice (TDCJ) – Parole Division, “Case File Material Processing for Release,” Policy and Operating Procedure Number PD/POP 2.1.13, 5 May 2011, p. 1.

⁵ TDCJ – Parole Division, “Initial Interview,” Policy and Operating Procedure Number PD/POP 3.1.1, 13 August 2009, pp. 3-4.

⁶ *See e.g.*, TDCJ – Parole Division, “Contact Standards for Regular Supervision of Cases,” Policy and Operating Procedure Number PD/POP 3.2.8, 19 August 2009, pp. 2-3; TDCJ – Parole Division, “Offender Employment,” Policy and Operating Procedure Number PD/POP 3.2.12, 1 September 2009.

⁷ TDCJ – Parole Division, “District Reentry Center (DRC) Administrative and Caseload Supervision Guidelines,” Policy and Operating Procedure Number PD/POP-3.13.1, 30 August 2010.

⁸ TDCJ – Parole Division, “District Reentry Center (DRC) Administrative and Caseload Supervision Guidelines,” Policy and Operating Procedure Number PD/POP-3.13.1, 30 August 2010, p. 1.

⁹ *Id.* pp. 10-11.

¹⁰ Project RIO was statutorily implemented in TEX. LAB. CODE § 306.001-.008. The statute included a provision explicitly detailing “Data Sharing” to ensure information is adequately exchanged, *see* TEX. LAB. CODE § 306.008.

¹¹ TDCJ – Parole Division, “Initial Interview,” *supra*, note 5.