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FACT SHEET 2012

## State and County Leadership Must Support the Texas Commission on Jail Standards

*Agency creates cost savings through avoided lawsuits, fewer inefficiencies, and effective jail operations*

### **THE COMMISSION DESERVES SUFFICIENT FUNDING AND RESOURCES TO PROVIDE VALUABLE ASSISTANCE TO TEXAS COUNTIES**

The Texas Commission on Jail Standards (Commission) serves various critical functions. For example, it enforces county compliance with jail standards through facility inspections, and it provides counties with much-needed and frequently requested technical assistance on the creation and operation of their jails and services. **In addition to producing vital cost savings for Texas, the Commission's work keeps local jail staff and inmates in safe environments, and it facilitates the safer reentry of men and women to Texas communities.**

With continued support by the Legislature, including through full funding of the Commission's biennial budget request, Commission staff will be able to strengthen their relationship with local Sheriffs and jail administrators. **Through their collective efforts to create accountability and effective resource allocation, the Commission and local leadership are ensuring that Texas' county jail system is strong, efficient, cost-effective, and well managed, while relieving taxpayers of the financial burden associated with growing jail populations.**

Texas must continue to support this agency in its crucial efforts to help local governments stay out of the courtroom by making smart choices about jail operations and management.

### **KEY FINDINGS**

- The Commission's purview extends to **244 jail facilities**;<sup>1</sup> as of November 1, 2012, Texas' county jails held nearly 66,000 inmates,<sup>2</sup> though nearly a million individuals cycle through local jails every year.<sup>3</sup>
- The Commission was **created in 1975 in response to lawsuits filed against Texas counties** for the poor conditions of confinement in local jails, as well as for the lack of regulated and funded inspections of those jail facilities.<sup>4</sup> Various groups, including the Sheriffs' Association of Texas and Baptist General Convention of Texas, advocated for the legislation, which protects the state and counties against costly lawsuits.
- The Commission's annual budget is less than \$1 million.<sup>5</sup> **The Texas Department of Criminal Justice spends that amount in approximately 2.5 hours.**<sup>6</sup>
- The Commission has a staff of just 16 people,<sup>7</sup> four of whom are facility inspectors.<sup>8</sup> **A 10% agency cut could result in the loss up to 3 staff members, possibly inspectors,** and pose retention problems should the Commission lose the ability to provide merit pay or travel expenditures.
- Commission budget cuts would also threaten the agency's crucial functions: inspections and enforcement of standards that help keep jail staff and inmates safe, vital technical assistance and training for counties, and facility needs analyses.<sup>9</sup> **This opens the door to costly federal lawsuits against counties for failure to properly operate their county jails or adequately manage inmates, which could devastate counties** already struggling to meet the needs of their community members.

*Solutions offered on reverse.*

## **COST-SAVING AND PUBLIC SAFETY-DRIVEN SOLUTIONS**

- (1) Provide the Commission its Baseline Budget Request to Maintain Operations.** Fully supporting the Commission’s baseline budget request (\$900,710 per year) is the least that Texas can do to continue to help counties cost-effectively meet the state’s public safety needs. We especially support funding to protect the Commission’s general operations, staff and inspectors, and training and resource availability.
- (2) Provide the Commission with Funding for Exceptional Items to Improve its Assistance to Counties.** Fully supporting the Commission’s two exceptional item requests is also critical to facilitate agency efficiency. This includes one staff person to provide support for other staff (\$28,450), and technology upgrades to increase information accessibility and streamline information dissemination (\$7,500 per year for two years).
- (3) Promote the Commission’s Long-Term Strategic Planning.** The state should allow the Commission to carry over money not fully spent on inspections and other strategies to the following year, for use during later inspections or for technical assistance to counties. In 2012, the Commission was forced to reimburse the state \$2,386 that it had been able to maintain due to frugal travel expenses and inspection efficiencies.<sup>10</sup>
- (4) Fully Equip the Commission to Expand its Role in the Prevention of Jail Overcrowding and the Facilitation of Successful Reentry.** Counties frequently ask the Commission for assistance in identifying strategies that will help them better manage their inmate populations. With fuller support from the state, the Commission can sit alongside local stakeholders during the planning stages of such strategies, helping counties bring down costly overcrowding and, in turn, creating safer, more manageable jail environments – a benefit to staff and inmates alike.

With increased staffing support, the Commission can also better assist counties in preparing individuals for a more seamless reentry to our communities, specifically through technical assistance relating to in-jail program development and implementation.

## **References**

<sup>1</sup> Texas Commission on Jail Standards (TCJS), “Legislative Appropriations Request (LAR) For Fiscal Years 2014 and 2015,” August 2012, p. 1. (1 of 3); available at [www.tcjs.state.tx.us/docs/LAR2012.pdf](http://www.tcjs.state.tx.us/docs/LAR2012.pdf).

<sup>2</sup> Texas Commission on Jail Standards, “Texas County Jail Population,” November 1, 2012; total population: 65,975. Available at [www.tcjs.state.tx.us/docs/POPSUMCurrent.pdf](http://www.tcjs.state.tx.us/docs/POPSUMCurrent.pdf).

<sup>3</sup> Texas Department of Criminal Justice (TDCJ), “H.B. 1711 Implementation Report,” Submitted to Governor, Lieutenant Governor, Speaker of the House, Senate Criminal Justice & House Corrections Committees, September 1, 2010, p. 4: “One million plus offenders are processed in local jails on an annual basis.”

<sup>4</sup> Brandon Wood, Texas Commission on Jail Standards, in presentation at American Bar Association, Criminal Justice Section, *Roundtable on Pretrial Detention in Texas*, held in Austin, Texas, March 30, 2012.

<sup>5</sup> TCJS, *LAR For Fiscal Years 2014 and 2015*, pp. 1. (3 of 3) and 2.A. (2 of 2).

<sup>6</sup> Texas Department of Criminal Justice, *Fiscal Year 2013 Operating Budget and Fiscal Years 2014-2015 Legislative Appropriations Request* (summary document), August 23, 2012, p. 1; available at [www.tdcj.state.tx.us/documents/finance/Operating\\_Budget\\_FY2013\\_LAR\\_Summary\\_FY2014-15.pdf](http://www.tdcj.state.tx.us/documents/finance/Operating_Budget_FY2013_LAR_Summary_FY2014-15.pdf). Estimated FY12 budget totaled \$3,002,158,965, or \$342,712 per hour.

<sup>7</sup> TCJS, *LAR For Fiscal Years 2014 and 2015*, pp. 1. (3 of 3) and 2.A. (2 of 2).

<sup>8</sup> Brandon Wood, Texas Commission on Jail Standards, in communication with Texas Criminal Justice Coalition, November 5, 2012.

<sup>9</sup> TCJS, *LAR For Fiscal Years 2014 and 2015*, p. 1. (3 of 3).

<sup>10</sup> Brandon Wood, Texas Commission on Jail Standards, in communication with Texas Criminal Justice Coalition, November 5, 2012.