



Reggie Smith, Policy Analyst
Work: (512) 441-8123, ext. 116
Cell: (210) 290-4726
rsmith@TexasCJC.org
www.TexasCJC.org

2019 FACT SHEET
HB 2158

Integrate Work Release and Peer Support to Improve Prison Reentry

MORE EFFECTIVE REENTRY MODELS ARE NECESSARY TO DECREASE RECIDIVISM & THE ASSOCIATED TAXPAYER EXPENSE

The unemployment rate among formerly incarcerated individuals is nearly five times higher than among the general population.¹ Evidence shows that rapid employment following release from prison leads to lower rates of recidivism, but many people – especially those who have been out of the workforce for lengthy periods or who have never worked in a regular job – need additional help finding work and reintegrating into the community.² This type of assistance is limited for those being released from the Texas Department of Criminal Justice (TDCJ), and these gaps can produce higher recidivism rates among certain groups leaving prison or state jail.³ Given that incarceration itself does not prepare someone to overcome the challenges of reentry, it is imperative that the state incorporate evidence-based models during confinement to more effectively prepare people for a safe, stable release into our communities.

INTEGRATED WORK RELEASE AND PEER SUPPORT LEADS TO BETTER OUTCOMES

Evidence-Based Work Release Programs are a Safe, Effective Step-Down to Release

With work release programs, eligible incarcerated individuals leave the corrections facility premises during the work day to receive paid employment in the surrounding community. Once individuals complete a day of work, they return to the facility, where they remain in the custody of the correctional institution for the night. These programs allow individuals to have job and financial stability prior to release, enabling them to pay child support and victim restitution. Several states, including Arkansas, Florida, Georgia, and Louisiana, have had these programs in place for years due to their effectiveness.⁴ Research has found the same:

- A 2016 study funded by the National Criminal Justice Reference Services found, “compelling evidence that work release is an effective correctional program in terms of significantly reducing the likelihood that prison releases will return to a life of crime and recycle through the court and correctional system.”⁵
- Studies have shown that work release programs are effective at reducing recidivism as measured by rearrests, reconviction, reincarceration, or supervision revocation for a technical violation.⁶

Certified Peer Specialists Integrate Peer Support into the Reentry Process

Peer support involves trained peer navigators with histories of substance use, mental health conditions, and criminal justice system involvement helping those with similar histories. They have achieved a reasonable degree of stability in their own lives and are now employed by local government and nonprofit agencies to provide individualized support to others with psychiatric disabilities and justice system involvement, helping them address employment, behavioral health, and other challenges. In 2015, the Texas Legislature funded a pilot program to evaluate the use and effectiveness of reentry peer support in three Texas jails, where people with complex needs are typically released to the community with little planning, preparation, or effective community programming. Results from the pilot program found:

- Criminal behavior and associated problems declined significantly over time; and
- Declines were observed in arrests, criminal planning, and recent history of criminal acts.⁷

RECOMMENDATION: SUPPORT HB 2158 BY REPRESENTATIVE WHITE

HB 2158 will create an integrated peer support and work release model to vastly improve outcomes for people released from Texas’ state corrections system, saving taxpayer dollars, protecting public safety, and supporting families of justice system-involved Texans.

Citations

- ¹ Prison Policy Initiative, *Out of Prison and Out of Work*, <https://www.prisonpolicy.org/reports/outofwork.html>.
- ² Manhattan Institute, *Prison-to-Work: The Benefits of Intensive Job-Search Assistance for Former Inmates*, March 26, 2015.
- ³ Legislative Budget Board, *Statewide Criminal and Juvenile Justice Recidivism and Revocation Report*, January 2019, http://www.lbb.state.tx.us/Documents/Publications/Policy_Report/4914_Recidivism_Revocation_Rates_Jan2019.pdf.
- ⁴ Council of State Governments Justice Center, *What Works in Reentry Clearinghouse: Employment*, <https://whatworks.csgjusticecenter.org/>.
- ⁵ Bales, William, et al, "An Assessment of the Effectiveness of Prison Work Release Programs on Post-Release Recidivism and Employment, Submitted to the National Institutes of Justice, December 1, 2015, <https://www.ncjrs.gov/pdffiles1/nij/grants/249845.pdf>.
- ⁶ Duwe, G., "An outcome evaluation of a prison work release program: Estimating effects of recidivism, employment, and cost avoidance," *Criminal Justice Policy Review*, (2014) 1–21.
- ⁷ Hogg Foundation for Mental Health, *Evaluation of DSHS Re-Entry Project (Rider 73): Final Evaluation Report*, <http://hogg.utexas.edu/wp-content/uploads/2019/02/Re-Entry-Peer-Support-Final-Report-Jan-10-2019.pdf>.