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This Father's Day, Simple Steps to Stronger Families

AUSTIN, TX – More than 90,000 fathers will be living in a Texas prison on Father's Day this year.¹ Some of them will soon be coming home. *The Texas Criminal Justice Coalition calls for changes that will give those families a fighting chance at success.*

Each year, over 70,000 people are released from Texas' prison system. More than half have actually completed their sentence, are not under supervision, and get little or no help as they try to reestablish their lives.²

When fathers get out of prison and rejoin their families, they may be carrying emotional problems created or exacerbated by time in prison,³ and they face new barriers to economic success. This Father's Day month, **1,300 Texas fathers who were living with their children at the time of their arrest will be released** and are now preparing to step back into their family role.⁴

"If you want someone to succeed when they return as fathers to their families after leaving prison, then they are absolutely going to need a job," said Doug Smith, Texas Criminal Justice Coalition. "Sadly, only a fraction of people in Texas prison get to attend vocational training, and everyone leaves prison only to find a wall of rejection from employers."

Texas joins Louisiana and Illinois among the most difficult states in which to get a job after prison, according to a recent study of barriers to reentry. Formerly incarcerated people who return to their families face 248 different limitations on jobs, licenses, and opportunities to start their own business.⁵

Simple Steps to Stronger Families

- **Allow people in state jail to earn access to parole:** People in state jail do not get parole at all. They serve their full sentence and are released without additional services. These fathers are incarcerated for the lowest-level felony offenses. Earning parole will get them home with access to jobs and other reentry services.

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- **Keep people closer to their families:** Texas should reclassify certain nonviolent low-level offenses to Class A misdemeanors. Fathers who are living in the home with their children would be imprisoned in county jail, closer to their families, rather than in the Texas Department of Criminal Justice.
- **Reduce the cost of phone calls:** Families pay very high rates for phone calls to and from their incarcerated loved ones. Reducing those costs will enable families to maintain closer relationships, which is especially crucial as it pertains to maintaining bonds between parents and children.
- **Create in-person visitation areas designed for children:** Children who do get to see their fathers in person often do so in a context that can increase stress and limit relationship development (through Plexiglas, in crowded loud rooms with hovering guards, with strict limits on physical contact and movement).⁶ Instead, visitation areas can be kid-friendly and enable positive, loving interaction with incarcerated parents.

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The Texas Criminal Justice Coalition works with peers, policy-makers, practitioners, and community members to identify and promote smart justice policies that safely reduce the state's costly over-reliance on incarceration – creating stronger families, less taxpayer waste, and safer communities.

¹ Texas Department of Criminal Justice, data prepared in response to Texas Criminal Justice Coalition Public Information Act request, 6/14/16.

² Texas Government Code Chapter 501.103 Reentry and Parole Referral Report, December 2015, Texas Department of Criminal Justice, Reentry and Integration Division, Parole Division, p. 3.

³ The Psychological Impact of Incarceration: Implications for Post-Prison Adjustment, Craig Haney, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, December 2001, <https://aspe.hhs.gov/basic-report/psychological-impact-incarceration-implications-post-prison-adjustment>.

⁴ Texas Criminal Justice Coalition estimate based on Texas Department of Criminal Justice (TDCJ) data and national estimates. About 3,500 fathers will be released from TDCJ in June. Of those, about 36% were likely living with their children at the time of arrest according to U.S. Department of Justice. Bureau of Justice Statistics Special Report, *Parents in Prison and Their Minor Children*, March, 2010, <http://www.bjs.gov/content/pub/pdf/pptmc.pdf>.

⁵ *Jobs after Jail*, Alliance for a Just Society, Feb. 2016, p. 15. Texas employment restrictions: restricted jobs, 226; restrictions on licenses and certifications, 133; business license restrictions, 81; total 248.

⁶ *Children's Contact With Their Incarcerated Parents*, Julie Poehlmann, Danielle Dallaire, Ann Booker Loper, and Leslie D. Shear, *Am Psychol.* 2010 Sep; 65(6): 575–598, <http://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC4229080/>.