



Texas Inmate Families Association  
*Strengthening families through support, education  
and advocacy*

## External Oversight for Texas Department of Criminal Justice (TDCJ) SB 485 - Miles / HB 1421 – J. Johnson

With the Prison Litigation Reform Act's limitations on an individual's ability to seek recourse through litigation, the fiscal crisis facing the state, the incarcerated individuals with serious mental illness and substance abuse issues, and the overall explosion in the prison population since Ruiz v. Estelle, there has never been a time when independent, external oversight was more needed.

For Texas families, communities and the State, there are clear public safety and cost-savings benefits to developing a system of independent, external oversight for Texas prisons. The need of oversight is most acutely felt by those living and working in the prisons on a daily basis. The views of these individuals must be taken into account and given significant consideration.

In 2011 and 2012, the Texas Criminal Justice Coalition surveyed individuals incarcerated in Texas prisons, their families, and corrections officers.

### Of responding corrections officers:

- 56% believed their overall work environment to be unsafe,
- 46% did not think safety concerns were addressed in an adequate manner,
- 45% did not find current safety policies and procedures to be effective, and
- 79% believed that TDCJ's current programs should be improved.

### Of responding incarcerated individuals:

- 91% identified the need for an independent corrections ombudsman as a highly important issue.

### Of responding families:

- 95.3% also agreed about the need for independent oversight.

## Five Critical Solutions

- (1) Develop an independent agency tasked with comprehensive oversight and monitoring of all TDCJ correctional facilities, consistent with the Texas Juvenile Justice Department's Ombudsman Office.
- (2) Provide the independent oversight body with full access to all facilities, data, incarcerated individuals, and corrections staff for routine monitoring, inspections, and gathering of information.
- (3) Increase oversight of the state's criminal justice and corrections agencies through an increased frequency of Sunset Advisory Commission evaluations.
- (4) Increase the frequency and opportunity for public input on important criminal justice issues to the Texas Board of Criminal Justice.
- (5) Develop independent grievance review boards.

Name: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

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