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Legislative Agenda

Texas Center for Justice and Equity
Solutions for Safe, Healthy, Just Communities

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Who We Are

Texas Center for Justice and Equity

The Texas Center for Justice and Equity (TCJE) is a nonpartisan, nonprofit organization headquartered in Austin, Texas, with staff in major counties throughout the state. Since 2000, TCJE has advocated to end mass incarceration, shift funding towards community supports, and reduce deep racial inequities in the criminal punishment system. Our work is guided by the needs of those most impacted by the system: people of color, people in poverty, and people with substance use disorder, mental health issues, and trauma. In our vision, all Texans live in safe, thriving communities where every person has the opportunity to succeed.

TCJE is formerly the Texas Criminal Justice Coalition.

TCJE is committed to a set of core values – including genuine safety, healing, justice, dignity, equity, anti-racism, and liberation – and our priorities are guided by the following overarching principles:

- ✓ **We must REVERSE the pipeline that’s pushing people into the criminal punishment system.** We want to address not just incarceration, but arrest, pretrial detention, probation, and more. That means engaging with other, intersecting systems that wrap people into the criminal punishment system.
- ✓ **We must SHRINK the number of people who are currently under correctional control or who are impacted by prior system involvement.** We must reduce the population of people in prisons and jails, as well as the number of people under supervision, like probation and parole. Furthermore, we must give people the tools and opportunities to overcome the harsh, long-term consequences of a conviction.
- ✓ **We must INVEST in approaches outside the criminal punishment system that support individual and community wellbeing.** We must shift investments away from the criminal punishment system and towards meaningful supports: programs and services that can help people address their needs – like substance use disorder, mental health problems, past trauma, or lack of housing. Addressing the root causes of crime will ultimately make our communities safer.
- ✓ **We must PROTECT the rights and wellbeing of people behind bars.** We must ensure the humane treatment of people who are incarcerated – preserving their dignity and their safety.



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After a tough 87th Legislative Session, TCJE took a step back to reflect and regroup. We’ve been holding community events, collecting stories, soliciting feedback from people impacted by the state’s criminal punishment system – including people still on the inside – and engaging with the works of advocates who have gone before and paved the way for us. Our work in 2023 seeks to elevate these calls for change.

NOTE: While this document contains TCJE’s priority policies for 2023, we anticipate supporting additional legislation. Please contact TCJE if you have any questions about the policies listed on the following pages or about our larger work.

System-Impacted Coalitions

Policies Championed by Formerly Incarcerated Leaders

TCJE is a founder or co-founder of three coalitions that prioritize the leadership of people who have been personally impacted by the criminal punishment system. They include the Texas Women's Justice Coalition (TWJC), the Statewide Leadership Council (SLC), and the new Finish the 5 Coalition.

Texas Women's Justice Coalition | *Founded in 2018, the Texas Women's Justice Coalition (TWJC) is a group of formerly incarcerated women, advocates, and service providers working to create change for incarcerated and returning women both locally and through state-level policy reform.*

Nearly 10,000 women are incarcerated in Texas prisons. Typically, these women have fewer programming options, as well as less access to programs, than men. Texas' 2019 Legislature took strong first steps to expand in-prison programming for women; specifically, HB 3227 required the Texas Department of Criminal Justice (TDCJ) to develop and implement policies that would increase and promote women's access to educational, vocational, substance use treatment, rehabilitation, life skills training, and pre-release programs. However, women report a limited number of spaces in new programs. Now, the Legislature must take the next step. Success on reentry is built on stability, with education and job skills being a crucial component. Women need access to the tools to live safe, productive, self-sustaining lives in the community.

Texas leaders should ensure that incarcerated women, including women in state jails, can **access a full range of programming options** within 45 days of arriving at their facilities.



America is currently responsible for 30 percent of the world's incarcerated female population, despite constituting only four percent of the global population of women.

Statewide Leadership Council | *The Statewide Leadership Council (SLC) is a group of Texans who have been arrested, incarcerated, or on probation or parole, or who have loved ones in the system. Since 2020, the SLC has been meeting with impacted people across Texas and fighting for change at the Capitol.*

SLC leaders will fight for three critical priorities in the 2023 Legislative Session:

1. **Common-sense parole**, which would give people earlier access to programming – like substance use treatment and cognitive intervention – prior to their parole review.
2. An **emergency management** plan for storms, pandemics, and other events in Texas prisons to ensure that incarcerated people have the support and supplies needed to make it through declared disasters without experiencing inadequate or dangerous conditions.
3. Criminal record-clearing reforms, called **Clean Slate and New Wings**, which would expand access to orders of nondisclosure for certain offenses, as well as automate the process in certain instances.



Finish the 5 Campaign

Our Journey to Zero Youth Prisons in Texas

Texas' youth prison system is in crisis and near collapse. As leaders investigate the inhumane conditions at state secure facilities, we have a real opportunity to overhaul Texas' entire approach to youth "justice." That means prioritizing supports for kids in their communities and schools.

A key partner in the Finish the 5 Coalition is Austin Liberation Youth Movement, a grassroots organization founded by area students. The youth-led coalition meets weekly and aims to recruit hundreds of members with the long-term goal of closing Texas' 5 youth prisons.

Texas leaders should commit to closing TJJJ's 5 state secure institutions by 2030 through a thoughtful, staggered closure plan.

The Legislature should invest in building communities' infrastructure to appropriately address the needs of children who would have been incarcerated, and allow recapture from closed facilities to reimburse the costs for those community-based resources. Among other things:

- Kids should have access to robust resources and restorative justice programming in their schools, along with at-home supports from local service providers, to improve mental health outcomes and violence prevention, and to prevent kids from coming into contact with the punishment system altogether.
- Kids should also have tailored treatment plans and case management outside of prison walls to help them safely return home from youth prisons. Short-term funding to counties will facilitate children's transition to non-punitive services; this should include the development and expansion of community-based service providers in partnership with the community, schools, and the Health and Human Services Commission (HHSC).
- Kids who cannot go home should live in safe, non-institutionalized settings, with caring adults who know how to effectively serve them.
- The state should establish a dedicated Office of Youth and Community Restoration within HHSC to ensure that children and their families are provided the appropriate, public health-focused resources to aid in violence prevention and mitigation.



Further information on the policies listed in this document, as well as other legislation that TCJE will be supporting during the 2023 Legislative Session, is available on our website: