

SUBJECT: Lowering eligibility age to 15 for state boot camp

COMMITTEE: Corrections — favorable, without amendment

VOTE: 9 ayes — Hightower, Gray, Allen, Culberson, Farrar, Longoria, Pitts, Serna, Telford
0 nays

WITNESSES: For — None
Against — None
On — Carl Reynolds, Texas Board of Criminal Justice; James A. Collins, Texas Department of Criminal Justice

BACKGROUND: Seventy-five to 90 days after the institutional division receives custody of an inmate, the sentencing court is authorized to suspend the sentence, place the person on community supervision (probation) and order the person to the state boot camp program. Persons sentenced to the boot camp program must be otherwise eligible for community supervision, at least 17 years old but younger than 26 years old, physically and mentally capable of participating in the program and not be convicted of a state jail felony.

DIGEST: HB 614 would lower from 17 years old to 15 years old the minimum age for eligibility in the state boot camp program.

SUPPORTERS SAY: Allowing 15 year olds to be eligible for the state boot camp program would give courts more flexibility in their sentencing and would allow these younger offenders to reap the benefits of the program. The boot camp program is designed to be part of a kind of shock punishment. An offender is sent to a state prison for a few weeks and then given a chance to go through the boot camp program and if successful, to be released on probation. This is designed for young offenders who could be straightened out and led away from a life of crime after getting a taste of prison life and experiencing the discipline of a boot camp. This opportunity should be available to all offenders sent to the prison system, especially the youngest ones, who might be amenable to change. Judges would have the discretion

to use the boot camp program only for those offenders for whom they deem it appropriate.

**OPPONENTS
SAY:**

HB 614 would probably be a seldom-used provision since the boot camp program is designed for persons who have committed less serious offenses, and 15-year olds who are in prison are probably serious offenders. Juveniles who are at least 15 at the time of an alleged felony may be certified by a court as an adult and tried and punished in the adult system. Most juveniles certified as adults have committed serious, violent or repetitive offenses that would make them poor candidates for the boot camp program.