

- SUBJECT:** Including prison industry workers in TDCJ career ladder
- COMMITTEE:** Corrections — committee substitute recommended
- VOTE:** 9 ayes — McReynolds, Madden, Hodge, Kolkhorst, Marquez, Martinez, S. Miller, Ortiz, Sheffield
- 0 nays
- 2 absent — Dutton, England
- WITNESSES:** For — Lance Lowry, AFSCME, Texas Correctional Employees, and 19 individuals; (*Registered, but did not testify*: Gary Anderson, Texas Public Employees Association; Ronda Bell and Brian Olsen, AFSCME; and 24 individuals)
- Against — None
- On — Brad Livingston and Rick Thaler, Texas Department of Criminal Justice; (*Registered, but did not testify*: Raymond Dear; Patrick Voth; David Youngblood
- BACKGROUND:** In 2001, the 77th Legislature created a career advancement ladder for correctional officers in the Texas Department of Criminal Justice (TDCJ). Those supervisors who work in an industrial oversight capacity were not included on this correctional officer advancement ladder.
- DIGEST:** CSHB 3497 would require that TDCJ’s career ladder program include prison industry workers.
- The bill would define “prison industry worker” as a department employee, other than a correctional officer, who was assigned to work on a program or project established under the Texas Correctional Industries office within TDCJ and whose job on a regular basis required routine contact with offenders. The term would include a farm manager, livestock supervisor, maintenance foreman, shop foreman, medical assistant, food service supervisor, steward, education consultant, commodity specialist, truck driver, or correctional counselor.

TDCJ would have to use the career ladder developed under the bill for anyone who became employed by TDCJ as a prison industry worker or who became eligible for promotion as such a worker on or after its September 1, 2009, effective date.

**SUPPORTERS  
SAY:**

CSHB 3497 is necessary to remedy an unfair disparity between two types of state prison workers who do the similar jobs but do not have the same opportunities for advancement and pay increases. Correctional officers currently are part of a career ladder, which provides for regular salary increases based upon months of satisfactory service. However, prison industry supervisors who perform similar offender control and supervision functions as correctional officers while also providing industrial management and training to offenders are not part of the career ladder. CSHB 3497 would remedy this situation by including industry workers in the career ladder with correctional officers.

Prison industry workers oversee offenders as part of the Texas Correctional Industries (TCI), a program designed to provide job skills to offenders, reduce recidivism, and provide industrial support to TDCJ and the state. TCI programs include license plate production, agricultural production, mattresses, soap, and clothes manufacturing and more. Industry workers oversee the inmates working in these programs and teach the inmates the skills necessary for the industries. They supervise the inmates while they move about factories and use tools and manufacturing equipment, and the supervisors can be called in to assist correctional officers for shakedowns or in other situations. It is only fair that prison industry workers be given the same advancement opportunities as correctional officers.

TDCJ has a shortage of correctional officers, and the state should do all it can to retain other prison workers who also supervise and work with offenders. The separate advancement track for industry supervisors results in them reaching the limits of possible advancement faster than other correctional officers, which can contribute to their leaving state service. The bill would not provide a blanket pay raise for these workers, but would provide advancement opportunities based on satisfactory service.

State funds spent to include prison industry supervisors on the career ladder would represent an investment in the prison system's valuable training and industrial programs and could help save the state money by retaining these employees.

OPPONENTS  
SAY:

Although prison industry supervisors may deserve to be included in the career ladder, CSHB 3497 would cost the state \$5.1 million per biennium. The state cannot afford to obligate itself to ongoing increases in spending at this time because of the current economic situation.

NOTES:

A similar bill, HB 315 by Miller, passed the House in 2007, but died in the Senate.