

Texas

The project selected Texas to receive intensive, nonpartisan research, analysis, and expertise. Among other factors, its leaders have demonstrated both a bipartisan commitment to explore meaningful policy change and a dedication to collecting and using criminal justice data as a basis for sound reforms.

Progress Update »

The 2007 Texas legislature took dramatic, bipartisan action to control crime and corrections costs. At the start of the year, the Texas Department of Criminal Justice projected a shortfall of 17,000 prison beds over the next five years and recommended the construction of 4,000 new beds at a cost of nearly \$400 million. Texas legislators on both sides of the aisle requested assistance from the Council of State Governments Justice Center, a partner of the Public Safety Performance Project, to identify options to increase public safety and avert the projected growth in the prison population.

Based on the Justice Center's nonpartisan research and analysis, the Legislature crafted a plan to reduce the need for new beds by reducing recidivism. The plan, approved by the legislature in late May, provides an investment of over \$200 million in treatment and diversion facilities and services, both behind prison walls and in community-based programs. It also cuts the maximum probation terms of some property and drug offenders from 10 to 5 years to help agencies tighten their supervision during the earlier years when offenders are mostly likely to commit new crimes. The bill ultimately passed by the legislature, which is awaiting Governor Perry's signature, represents roughly \$250 million in net savings over the upcoming biennium and, along with other measures, is expected to avert much of the projected prison growth. In fact, while the legislation authorizes funding for three of the eight prisons originally requested, the dollars for them can be tapped only if the other approved measures fail to erase the bed shortfall.

State Profile »

A profile of Texas that provides statistical and analytical data about its sentencing and corrections systems, describes factors shaping those systems, and highlights opportunities for reform.

[Download Texas state profile](#) (PDF) Adobe Reader® required.

State Research & Analysis »

Justice Reinvestment State Brief: Texas

This brief is part of a series for state policymakers interested in learning how particular states across the country have employed a data-driven strategy called justice reinvestment to better manage corrections spending, increase public safety, and redirect some of the savings toward efforts that will improve conditions in the neighborhoods to which most people released from prison return.

[Download Texas State Brief](#)

Mid Legislative Session Report: Funding Correctional Treatment and Diversion Initiatives in Texas

The Council of State Governments Justice Center, a Public Safety Performance Project partner, prepared this detailed analysis of the Whitmire/Madden Correctional Treatment and Diversion Plan for policy maker consideration in April, 2007.

[Download Texas mid legislative session report](#)

Comparison of Texas Budget Proposals to Manage the Growth of the Prison Population and Increase Public Safety

The Council of State Governments Justice Center, a Public Safety Performance Project partner, prepared this two-page analysis that compares public safety and prison funding as requested by the Texas Department of Criminal Justice and as recommended by the Senate and House for fiscal years 2008-2009.

[Download Texas prison budget comparison](#)

Policy Options to Increase Public Safety and to Manage the Growth of the Prison Population

The Council of State Governments Justice Center, a Public Safety Performance Project partner, prepared this detailed two-page analysis of the prison bed and spending implications of several policy reform options available to Texas policy makers.

[Download Texas policy options](#)

Justice Reinvestment: A Framework to Improve the Effectiveness of Justice Policies in Texas

The Council of State Governments Justice Center, a Public Safety Performance Project partner, prepared this slideshow analyzing the Texas prison system and provided policy options as part of its Justice Reinvestment Initiative.

[Download Texas Justice Reinvestment slideshow](#)

Texas Justice Reinvestment Scenarios

The Council of State Governments Justice Center, a Public Safety Performance Project partner, prepared this summary of the prison-bed and spending implications of several policy reform options.

[Download Texas Justice Reinvestment Scenarios](#)

News

Select news clips »

- **Editorial: Texas lawmakers send mixed messages on penal reform**
- *Waco Tribune-Herald*
- June 13th, 2007

For once, this time around the Texas Legislature was talking smart about the tremendous black hole that is prisons. Even more impressively, it acted on the intelligent talk. The saying, "Texas is a whole other country" certainly applies to its prison system. It holds 153,000 inmates. That's more than some states have people — more than the entire populations of Vermont, Wyoming and Alaska...

To read the full article, visit the [Waco-Tribune-Herald's Web site](#).

**Registration required.*

- **Prison reform as method**
- *Austin American-Statesman*
- May 23rd, 2007

The Texas Legislature appears well on its way toward enacting significant and welcome change to meet society's obligation and need to punish lawbreakers without breaking the treasury and turning minor offenders into major criminals. The session began with state officials proposing at least 12,000 more prison beds by 2012, at a cost of \$520 million to build three prisons and fund drug- and alcohol-treatment programs. Construction costs are only the first

expense; prisons must have guards 24 hours a day, seven days a week; prisoners must be fed and clothed, and they must get medical care...

To read the full article, visit the [Austin American-Statesman's Web site](#).

**This is a pay service.*

- **Prison guard shortage called a risk**

- *The Houston Chronicle*

- April 15, 2007

As leading lawmakers disagree on whether the state needs to build new prisons, Texas can't fully staff the lockups it has now. Some warn that a chronic shortage of correctional officers poses a danger. "There's a public safety issue with the shortage," said Sen. John Whitmire, D-Houston, Senate Criminal Justice Committee chairman and Finance Committee member. "I'm told where you need two (correctional officers), you've got one, and sometimes you have none. It means that the public is at risk of a breakout. It means you endanger corrections officers, and you potentially endanger inmates."...

To read the full article, visit the [Houston Chronicle's Web site](#).

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- **Lawmakers locking in prison policy changes**

- *The Austin American-Statesman*

- February 9, 2007

Billed as the biggest shift in Texas corrections policy in years, proposals to greatly expand rehabilitation and treatment for convicts have made headlines for months as legislative leaders grapple for a way to avoid building expensive new prisons. A month into the legislative session, the massive bills have yet to be filed. And they probably won't be, say lawmakers pushing the changes.

To read the full article, visit the [Austin American-Statesman Web site](#).

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- **Editorial: Texas prisons need more treatment options**

- *The Waco Tribune-Herald*

- February 6, 2007

Texas lawmakers need to come up with alternatives to the politically popular "lock 'em up and throw away the key" approach to criminal justice.

The Texas Department of Criminal Justice is asking lawmakers for money to pay for 5,000 new prison beds, including 4,000 in two new maximum security prisons and 1,000 in a medium security prison.

To read the full article, visit the [Waco Tribune-Herald Web site](#).

- **A welcome shaking**

- *The Fort Worth Star-Telegram*

- February 2, 2007

John Whitmire is bulldog-angry. The Houston lawmaker, the longest-serving member of the state Senate and chairman of its Criminal Justice Committee, has sunk his teeth deep into the Texas prison system and clearly intends to shake it until some of its stupider practices fall by the wayside.

This is not Whitmire's first fight with the people who run the prisons. He has headed the Criminal Justice Committee or been one of its most influential members since at least 1993.

To read the full article, visit the [Fort Worth Star-Telegram Web site](#).

**This is a pay service.*

- **Legislators are urged to shift focus on prisons**

- *The Fort Worth Star-Telegram*

- January 31, 2007

If Texas would parole more low-risk, nonviolent inmates and provide more services to discourage their use of drugs and alcohol, the state could save half a billion dollars over the next five years and avoid the prospect of adding 17,000 prison beds by 2012, a criminal justice analyst told lawmakers Tuesday.

To read the full article, visit the [Fort Worth Star-Telegram Web site](#).

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- **Study's ideas counter prison sprawl**

- *The Houston Chronicle*

- January 31, 2007

More drug and alcohol treatment and fewer new prison cells could save Texas \$442 million over the next five years, a new study shows. The study, presented Tuesday at a joint meeting of the House Corrections Committee and Senate Criminal Justice Committee, shows the state could avoid spending \$377 million for construction of prisons for 5,000 more inmates.

To read the full article, visit the [Houston Chronicle Web site](#).

**This is a pay service.*

- **Report identifies prison problems**

- *The Austin American-Statesman*

- January 31, 2007

The state's criminal justice system came under intense criticism Tuesday as legislative leaders made clear that business as usual — building prisons every few years — will no longer be a solution to an increasing shortage of cells and operating problems.

A new study and testimony at the Capitol on Tuesday appeared to portray the system as seriously ailing. Lawmakers heard about crime-ridden neighborhoods whose residents are filling prisons at disproportional rates, a mushrooming prison population and growing prison costs.

To read the full article, visit the [Austin American-Statesman Web site](#).

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- **Lt. Gov. Dewhurst Calling For More Prisons**

- By Polly Ross Hughes, *The Houston Chronicle*

- January 25, 2007

AUSTIN — Lt. Gov. David Dewhurst said Wednesday that Texas needs to build prisons to hold 5,000 new beds, a view at odds with a major report key lawmakers will release next week that will stress treatment programs and prison alternatives.

To read the full article, visit the [Houston Chronicle Web site](#).

- **Prison Chief Supports More Rehabilitation Programs**

- By Mike Ward, *Austin American-Statesman*

- January 11, 2007

Texas criminal justice czar Brad Livingston says he wholeheartedly supports a legislative move to drastically expand rehabilitation and treatment programs for convicts. And he supports the idea to re-establish a new entity to track criminal justice trends as well.

To read the full article, visit the [Austin American-Statesman Web site](#).

- **Prison Revamp Long on Rehab, Short on New Cells**

- By Emily Ramshaw, *The Dallas Morning News*

- January 11, 2007

AUSTIN — Texas lawmakers on an influential state commission formally recommended an overhaul of the prison rehabilitation, probation, and parole systems Wednesday, hoping to reduce crowding without building new units. State corrections officials, though, want hundreds of millions of dollars to build three new prisons, saying that's the best way to prevent a projected shortfall of 11,000 beds by 2011.

To read the full article, visit the [Dallas Morning News Web site](#).

- **'Smart' approach to prisons sought: Legislators push rehab, resist department's call for more lockups**

- By Emily Ramshaw, *The Dallas Morning News*

- January 4, 2007

AUSTIN — Texas prisons are packed, and state corrections officials are urging the Legislature to build three units. But traditionally tough- on-crime lawmakers appear ready to take a different approach: rehabilitation.

To read the full article, visit the [Dallas Morning News Web site](#).

- **More prisons not answer, 2 Texas lawmakers insist; Whitmire and Madden press for higher parole rates and more money for drug programs**

- By Lisa Sandberg, *The Houston Chronicle*

- November 27, 2006

AUSTIN — In what may indicate a pendulum shift in a state that's become almost synonymous with incarceration, two key Texas lawmakers, a Republican and a Democrat, are showing little appetite for more concrete walls and steel bars.

To read the full article, visit the [Houston Chronicle Web site](#).

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