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## STATE BUDGET

### Prison officials seek a pardon on spending cuts

By PEGGY FIKAC  
Austin Bureau  
Feb. 16, 2010, 10:22PM

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#### CUTS ON THE TABLE

Possible spending reductions identified by state agencies include:

##### Texas Education Agency

- Eliminate funding for steroid testing, \$1 million.
- Cut part of funding for textbooks and kindergarten materials, \$10 million

##### Texas Department of Criminal Justice

- Identified \$294.3 million in possible cuts, including cuts at the Board of Pardons and Paroles
- Cut correctional security operations, \$84.4 million
- Cut correctional psychiatric care/managed health care, \$41.9 million
- Cut probation funding, \$22 million
- Eliminate funding for about 817 beds at contract prisons, privately operated state jails and pre-parole transfer facilities, \$10.7 million
- Reduce parole supervision, \$8.1 million
- Cut substance abuse treatment, \$7.8 million

##### Texas Department of Public Safety

- Cut funding for local border security overtime, nearly \$10.4 million

##### Health and Human Services

- Eliminate 50 beds at four state psychiatric hospitals, \$27 million
- Cut rates for health care providers who treat Medicaid patients, nearly \$98.6 million (Of note: The reductions would cost the state \$238 million in federal matching funds.)

##### Governor's Office

- Cut Texas Enterprise Fund, \$20 million

##### Texas Department of Transportation

- Reduce appropriation for debt service on general obligation bonds, \$20 million

recidivism; cause significant growth in the prison population; require a substantial staff reduction of nearly 3,100 TDCJ employees; and negatively impact both supervision in the community and security within our institutions." Brad Livingston, TDCJ executive director, said in a letter identifying the proposed cuts.

The prison system said it can make the other \$50.4 million in cuts but warned even that would "remove all flexibility to manage potential fiscal shortfalls and operational challenges" in the current two-year budget period.

Other agencies that released their proposals Tuesday included the Texas Education Agency and the Texas Department of Public Safety.

TEA's \$135.5 million in possible cuts include eliminating state funding to the University Interscholastic League for a steroid testing program, saving \$1 million. Testing has found few students using steroids. It also identified a \$10 million cut in funding for textbooks and kindergarten materials.

#### Overtime pay grant

The \$14.6 million in possible cuts identified by DPS include nearly \$10.4 million in overtime pay for border security conducted by local law enforcement agencies. DPS spokeswoman Tela Mange said a separate \$16 million federal grant available through Perry's office would cover some overtime.

Some agencies had made their proposals public earlier, including human services agencies that could save \$303 million in state spending through such cuts as reducing Medicaid rates for health care providers and serving fewer patients at four state psychiatric hospitals. Those state cuts would cost the state \$238 million in federal matching funds.

[pfikac@express-news.net](mailto:pfikac@express-news.net)

AUSTIN — Texas' prison system is asking state leaders to exempt it from most of a proposed 5 percent spending cut, warning that reductions could hurt prison security and make it more likely offenders would relapse into crime.

State agencies, including the Texas Department of Criminal Justice, are identifying cuts at the direction of Gov. Rick Perry, Lt. Gov. David Dewhurst and House Speaker Joe Straus.

The agencies and universities were directed to identify potential cuts because of a looming multibillion-dollar state budget gap. Some exceptions will be allowed, and the three leaders will review whether the identified cuts should occur.

"It is important that we make every effort during these difficult economic times to live within our means," Straus said. "State revenues are down, and we face hard choices. But it's no different from what many businesses and families in Texas face every day. We are still receiving proposals from the agencies, and it's a bit early to discuss recommendations we would take.

"As we review these recommendations, we will certainly want to be careful that these changes are not made at the expense of public safety and essential services."

F. Scott McCown, executive director of the Center for Public Policy Priorities, which advocates programs for lower-income Texans, suggested state leaders look beyond spending cuts.

"We underwent deep cuts in 2003. There's nothing easy left to cut. Every cut is going to be a cut to an important state service or program," he said. "What we need is a balanced approach to balancing the budget.

"We need to be seriously talking about how to increase revenue by eliminating some no-longer-justified tax exemptions and looking at other options to make sure we have a balanced approach to a serious problem."

#### Support for cuts

Former state lawmaker Talmadge Heflin, of the Texas Public Policy Foundation, which advocates limited government, said the call for cuts is "an excellent approach."

"I'm not surprised to hear agencies such as TDCJ ask for exemptions," Heflin said. "That is a lot of times kind of the first order of business — you see how serious the leadership is about that. But I believe that you can always reduce budgets and continue to deliver services."

TDCJ officials identified \$294.3 million in cuts, but asked to be exempted from \$243.9 million worth of them.

Among those the agency wants to exempt are the elimination of 2,037 correctional officer positions, "resulting in reduced staff levels that could place public safety and the security of our institutions at risk." The agency has more than 26,300 such positions.

Other cuts would reduce parole officers, probation officer positions, academic and vocational training, treatment services, halfway-house placements and correctional psychiatric care and managed health care.

#### Negative effects warned

"The operational impact of a funding reduction to these operations (probation, offender treatment services, institutional security and offender health care, and parole supervision) will likely increase

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- soulfried** wrote:  
Restructure the drug laws and you'd have the extra tax money and drop the inmate population by over 25%. Thus reducing the staff needed and making room for the real criminals.  
2/16/2010 10:55:07 PM  
 (63) (27) (3) [\[Report abuse\]](#)
- stopit** wrote:  
 (0)

By gov. Perry's own words 13.5 million a month is spent on detaining illegals, who have committed crimes, theres a 162 million a year that could be cut. If our government would get serious on closing our borders, and stop the flow of illegals entering the country. Thats one thing about some third world counties they are swift and fast with punishing the drug dealers, murders, rapist, about 3 -4 weeks its bye bye law breaker. Sounds cold I know but some stay on death row in the U.S. for 20 odd years. And the tax players foot the bills for it, some know they will die of old age before they are finally layed to rest by the state.

2/16/2010 11:24:06 PM

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**TomJefferson** wrote:

Sounds like TX prison officials need to visit Sheriff Joe Arpaio of Maricopa County AZ and get some efficiency training..

2/16/2010 11:18:19 PM



(5)

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**mrgoodcat7** wrote:

The pay to TDCJ guards is a joke at best. I have no idea how the state gets a many people as they do to take the job. I am not saying that they need six figure a year salaries for what they do, but the guards and other personnel should earn a decent wage for their labors.

--

I am not a prison employee. I just know what they make because I know some employees of the prison system.

2/17/2010 12:19:24 AM

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**theysaidwhat** wrote:

Get in line with everybody else.

2/16/2010 10:44:01 PM



(0)

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**anarchistinalief** wrote:

Davidwr wrote:

Cutting prison, probation, parole, rehab, and crime-prevention funding will likely cost more in the long run than it saves.

-

Despite Perry's silly campaign nonsense the state legislature is facing severe curbacks in the next session. Already revenues are about 20% behind the rosy projections. No department or agency should be granted a blanket exemption ESPECIALLY one as grossly incompetent as TDCJ! They should 'earn' their budget strictly on merit of accountability.

-

Of course decriminalization of weed would do wonders towards reducing unnecessary prison population and allow drastic cuts in prisons, courts and policing.

2/17/2010 8:38:05 AM

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**45caliber** wrote:

The main problem with the TDCJ is that the state legislature has ignored them for years. They just got their first pay raise in years because the legislature finally realized that they couldn't get or keep security people if they could get a lot more somewhere else.

And while I respect teachers, why should they get all the raises as they are doing now? When you consider the cost of living here compared to NY or CA and consider they work 9 months a year instead of 12, they get paid better than most of the rest of us.

2/17/2010 8:35:17 AM

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**Davidwr** wrote:

Stu\_: There are several major differences between a government-run public service and a privatized one:

\*Privatized programs may run under different employment, tax, and other regulations that may make them more or less efficient than publicly run programs

\*Privatized programs are inherently less accountable to the public and can be more opaque

\*Both private and public programs have opportunities for financial and political abuse and mis-use, but they are different types of opportunities.

\*Privatization is more in keeping with a capitalist, minimal-government approach

\*Publicly-run services are more in keeping with accountability to the voter

In a given circumstance, it may make more sense to privatize a particular government program. In another state or in another time in history, it may make more sense to keep a similar program publicly run. This goes not just for prisons, but municipal utilities, major industries, highway construction, toll road ownership and management, security forces, etc. etc.

Modern-day Texans seem to favor at least giving privatization a fair shake when it comes to things like prison management.

2/17/2010 8:33:24 AM

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**Davidwr** wrote:

Cutting prison, probation, parole, rehab, and crime-prevention funding will likely cost more in the long run than it saves.



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Yes, if there are any inefficiencies or other fat in the budget that can be trimmed, trim it, but if it's all mean and bone, don't many any cuts. In fact, if the department is "under-nourished" and unable to work at peak efficiency due to lack of funding, increase funding - you'll save money and have less crime in the long run if you do so.

2/17/2010 8:26:57 AM

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**Stu\_** wrote:

What people don't understand is the politics between TDCJ and the Gov's office. Rick Perry and Co. has for years tried to undermine the correctional system. He has repeatedly tried to privatize the prisons claiming that they save money. However, one must realize that it costs the same to house an offender in a private facility as it does in TDCJ.

The only "savings" that can happen is by cutting staff i.e. security personel. One must ask themselves this- If the prison can't keep officers staffed at wages between 24k-36k a year, how in the hell are private prisons able to keep staff at 8-10 bucks an hour? They Can't I'm just saying.

2/17/2010 8:24:47 AM

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