



Comments Submitted to the Jail Standards Commission by Marc Levin, Director, Center for Effective Justice

Texas Jail Standards Commission Board Meeting

August 5, 2010

The Center for Effective Justice at the Texas Public Policy Foundation focuses its research on policies that cost-effectively reduce crime, restore victims, and reform offenders.

We have appreciated the opportunity to work with the Jail Standards Commission, county officials throughout the state, and other research groups in pursuit of best policies and practices to promote public safety and manage local jail populations. Jails are a vital function of local governments, but jail space must be prioritized for those who pose a danger to public safety or for whom there is no other means to reasonably assure that they will appear at their trial. In too many communities, jail has become the default, long-term option for the nonviolent mentally ill and homeless. More effective diversion and reentry efforts are critical to stopping the revolving door.

We are pleased to attach several of our publications that relate to county jail issues, including jail management and utilization in Harris County which is a subject of the Commission's meeting today. These materials highlight examples of possible strategies that Harris and other counties can employ to enhance public safety besides simply building more jails or overfilling existing jails, which in Harris County caused taxpayers to incur more than \$40 million in overtime in 2009. These items are as follows:

- *Texas Budget Source* Article, "Harris County pays millions for overtime; need for \$250 million facility questioned," June 16, 2010.
- TPPF Policy Perspective, "Mental Illness and the Texas Criminal Justice System," May 2009
- *Houston Chronicle* Commentary, "How Harris County can survive without new jails," November 18, 2007.

We were pleased that the Commission earlier this year adopted our recommendation of including a question on the variance application form asking the county applying for the variance what measures they have taken and are taking to effectively manage their jail population. This is important information for both the Commission and taxpayers to have in the interest of promoting accountability, transparency, and efficiency.

Thank you for your consideration. We look forward to continuing to be a resource for the Commission and other policymakers seeking to strengthen our criminal justice system.

Best Regards,

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