

# We need to strengthen Texas' probation system

**W**illiamson County District Attorney John Bradley misrepresented the pending probation legislation, HB 2193, in his Forum May 12 on the Viewpoints Page.

The House Corrections Committee and the Senate Criminal Justice Committee studied these issues for four years and issued reports recommending these improvements.

There have been at least seven public hearings this legislative session on the issue. The House Corrections Committee hosted a large private work session this spring.

John Bradley generally ignored the hearings and failed to attend the private session.

Today, an astonishing one in 20 Texans is under the control of the Texas criminal justice system — in prison, on probation, or on parole.

We cannot effectively monitor five percent of our population. If we want to keep the public safe, we have to find a better way.

With probation officer caseloads hovering around 150 per person, our system is weak because it fails to monitor probationers appropriately.

When one misbehaves, we revoke probation and send him or her back to prison instead of correcting the behavior. When one is successfully rehabilitated, we continue to burden him or her with meetings and fees that hinder the ability to get on with life.

Texas' probation lengths are far longer than is recommended by national and state experts. As a result, we send 26,600 Texans to prison every year be-

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cause they fail probation.

HB 2193 would increase judicial involvement with probationers by increasing judicial compliance reviews. Every felony probationer who the court feels should be on probation for 10 years will still be on probation for ten years, at the court's discretion.

Bradley asserts that the bill "will add no new services," but it would basically double the number of drug courts in Texas.

It would add programs to support those courts, plus new funding. This legislation is also part of a larger funding effort — the budget bills this session add an historic \$60 million in new funds to the Texas probation system and \$10 million more for parole diversion.

Bradley also claims the legislation would "damage our ability to protect society from criminals."

On the contrary, the legislation is founded on clear research from the Department of Justice, the Texas Criminal Justice Policy Council, the Legislative Budget Board, the TDCJ Community Justice Assistance Division, the Judicial Advisory Council, and numerous professors and other experts.

According to all of these experts, HB 2193 would reduce crime more effec-

tively than what we have now.

Bradley also says that the measure would "pressure judges" to release probationers.

But HB 2193 would untie the hands of our courts so that judges would have a great deal of new freedom to control probationer behavior.

Bradley attempts to alarm the public by claiming that courts would be forced to wait until a defendant harms another victim before sending him to prison. No new crime is ever required by this legislation before sending a probationer to prison.

The most disturbing aspect of Bradley's article involves the serious issue of sex offenders and child molesters. Bradley claims that judges will lose authority over sex offenders, especially child molesters. The only thing HB 2193 does for sex offenders is give them more intense supervision when they are on probation.

Bradley issued a written call to action, to all Texas prosecutors to make their voices heard at the Senate hearing last week. But no one other than John Bradley came to testify.

Our senators and representatives have studied these issues for years. They know our system needs strengthening. Texas must make more effective use of the tax dollars we allocate to corrections.

We must do more to protect the public safety. HB 2193 would do just that.

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