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CONTACT: Anna Núñez, ACLU of Texas, 713-942-8146 x 103, [media@aclutx.org](mailto:media@aclutx.org)

## **ACLU of Texas Statement on Need for Improvements to the Criminal Justice System in Texas**

"The State of Texas has been a leader in criminal justice reforms, but we have so much more work to do. We're still making criminals out of kids who miss school, pushing them into the criminal justice system unnecessarily. Our county jails are over-taxed with people with mental illness who don't belong there and won't get well. We have the fourth highest incarceration rate in the country, needlessly locking up people for non-violent offenses like drug possession. We're releasing prisoners back into our communities without the support to ensure they stay out of prison. And we continue to allow for-profit prison companies to bilk the state for millions of dollars while operating substandard facilities.

To save taxpayer money and make our communities safer and stronger, we need intervention programs that keep kids in school and out of jail, diversion and treatment programs for low-level drug offenders and people with mental illness, and re-entry support for incarcerated people returning to our communities. We need to right-size the state prison system by closing private prison facilities. And finally, we need to re-examine the State's over-reliance on the expensive and ineffective practice of solitary confinement. The evidence is unassailable: locking offenders in tiny cells for 22 or more hours a day without any human contact for years at a time is creating a mental health crisis for prison administrators, undermining rehabilitation, and making our communities less safe."

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**AMERICAN CIVIL LIBERTIES UNION OF TEXAS**

**DALLAS OFFICE**  
P.O. BOX 600169  
DALLAS, TX 75360  
T/ 214.346.6575

**RIO GRANDE VALLEY OFFICE**  
P.O. BOX 6087  
BROWNSVILLE, TX 78523  
T/ 956.465.1905

**STATE CAPITOL OFFICE**  
P.O. BOX 12905  
AUSTIN, TX 78711  
T/ 512.478.7300

**STATE HEADQUARTERS**  
P.O. BOX 8306  
HOUSTON, TX 77288  
T/ 713.942.8146

**[WWW.ACLUTX.ORG](http://WWW.ACLUTX.ORG)**