



## **Smart Criminal Justice Reform in Texas: Ending the Vicious Cycles of Incarceration and Poverty**

Goodwill Central Texas (GCT) believes in the power of work. As the expert in work for almost six decades, GCT has learned what studies have echoed: employment, education, and housing are the leading indicators of long-term success for people with criminal backgrounds. More than 65% of people we serve have criminal backgrounds, most from disadvantaged backgrounds. Now is the time to implement real reform that strikes at the heart of the criminal justice system – working to end the school-prison pipeline; creating opportunities for individuals and families to thrive, while strengthening our economy and community.

We need to implement reform that keeps young people from entering the system, hence becoming a product of the system. We have witnessed the downward spiral that a 17 year-old faces once they have been incarcerated or have established a criminal record. It is rare that they can shake free of their past, and their likelihood of returning to a life of criminal activity is significant. Raise the age, truancy reform, and the expansion of educational opportunities both inside and out of the justice system is imperative.

Moreover, people with a criminal background, regardless of age, have limited opportunities post-release. No one wins when an individual cannot work, take care of his or her family or contribute economically to society. Improving re-entry outcomes and the path to re-entry are essential. In particular, we should improve educational outcomes at Windham ISD, improve access to housing, improve opportunities for the integration of workforce training, education, and other programming to fill gaps in rehabilitative services, and increase the opportunities for licensing, thus expanding employment opportunities.

In addition, modifying penalties for minor drug possession, improving our state jail system and improving probation incentives and outcomes will positively change the landscape for of our justice system, increasing the probability that disadvantaged and minority individuals will be successful.

The opportunity to work, the opportunity for dignity, and the opportunity to take care of a family are paramount to a thriving society. Goodwill Central Texas is committed to creating a safe, stable, and thriving Texas through the power of work – the time for real criminal justice reform is now.