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Criminal Justice System Needs Changes ***TAB backs reform in both the adult and juvenile justice systems***

AUSTIN, TX— With time running out on this legislative session, the Texas Association of Business is renewing the call for reform in both the adult and juvenile justice systems in Texas.

“We don’t want people to have a life sentence for making a mistake,” said TAB CEO Bill Hammond. “While they may not spend life in prison for a non-violent offense, that conviction will haunt them for the rest of their lives. Under current law, it is almost impossible for them to get their lives back on track. They have trouble getting a driver license, housing and a job, all things critical to succeed and thrive.”

TAB supports an overhaul in the adult criminal justice system to make probation the first punishment option for non-violent offenses. “Our association’s emphasis is ensuring that, when appropriate, judges consider probation first for nonviolent offenders, especially first-time nonviolent offenders,” said Hammond. “Probation offers a cost-effective solution - \$3 per day vs. around \$50 per day for incarceration. It also allows someone to continue working, paying bills and taxes, keeping up with child support and maintaining other financial and personal commitments.

“This issue boils down to separating those we are mad at from those we are afraid of,” said Hammond. “Those whom we are afraid of, violent offenders, should be sent to prison and removed from society for a very long time. We have always supported that. Those we are mad at, nonviolent offenders, should be given the chance at probation first.”

TAB actively supports change in the parole system for those non-violent offenders, who have been sent to prison and served their time. “The biggest challenge for parolees is finding a place to live, because few will rent to them,” said Hammond. “We favor limiting landlords’ liability for simply having rented an apartment to parolees, with some exceptions. This would not include people who have been paroled for violent crimes and sexual offenses.” We feel that people who have made a mistake, served their time and are truly repentant should be given the chance to have a meaningful life. That mistake should not forever limit their chances to make a living,

support their family, stay off government assistance, do good work, pay taxes and make a positive difference.”

TAB is working for changes in the juvenile justice system this legislative session as well. One major reform that would help countless students would keep them out of the criminal justice system altogether by decriminalizing school offenses like truancy. “Right now, the truancy laws and policies in many of our school districts are driving absent students into the courtroom, rather than back into the classroom,” said Hammond. “Student absences can start piling up for a variety of reasons – avoiding a bully, working to help put food on the table, health problems, academic difficulties or a classic bad attitude, to name just a few. Sending truant kids to court won’t solve these problems, but it does leave students with criminal records that make it harder to get into college or get a job.”

TAB also supports keeping teen offenders closer to home and including 17-year-olds in the juvenile justice system, rather than automatically putting them in the adult system. “In the adult system, youth are less likely to get the education and rehabilitative services they need to get back on track,” said Hammond. “When 17-year-olds are locked-up with adult offenders, they also face greater risks of assault, so sheriffs have to spend more of our tax dollars to keep them separate from older inmates.”

These solutions are smart and will help keep more Texans productive and able to meet their obligations to themselves and their families.

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As the state chamber of commerce, the Texas Association of Business is the most influential and dominant voice for public policy issues affecting business in Texas. Through proven results-oriented advocacy and member services, TAB develops a climate in Texas, which enables more than 4,000 business members and their 600,000+ employees to operate efficiently and profitably, thus creating new jobs. TAB is proud to be the official state partner of the National Association of Manufacturers.

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