

SENATE CONCURRENT RESOLUTION

WHEREAS, There were over a million reports of crimes committed against Texans in 1995, each one a reality that impacted the lives of numerous people; and

WHEREAS, Restoring order, security, and protection to Texas neighborhoods is government's most fundamental responsibility, and a flourishing, prosperous society is impossible if our communities are imprisoned by violence and fear; and

WHEREAS, Although the crime rate is improving and violent offenders are serving longer sentences, law-abiding Texans deserve better than seeing criminals shuttle back and forth between society and jail with a recidivism rate of almost 50 percent within the first three years of release; and

WHEREAS, Because nearly one-half of released inmates are soon jailed again, often on more serious and violent crimes, it is incumbent upon the State of Texas, which maintains one of the world's largest prison systems, to continue its efforts to seek out and enlist the aid of all methods effective at breaking the expensive and tragic cycle of criminal behavior and in seeing that criminals get changed, not just released; and

WHEREAS, Most inmates will eventually be released back into society, and such offenders need strong role models, moral guidance, and the accountability of personal relationships to escape the destructive habits and moral crisis that fuel criminal behavior; offenders need an environment conducive to the growth of confidence, accountability, self-reliance and hopefulness, and a community that cares about transforming lives from the inside out so that ex-offenders remain ex-offenders; and

WHEREAS, A growing body of empirical evidence gathered by health and criminology experts demonstrates the power of religious commitment, crime's age-old enemy, to combat

antisocial values, remold the basic beliefs and attitudes of offenders, and help them reenter society as contributing, self-sufficient citizens, which benefits all Texans; and

WHEREAS, Religion's power to inhibit destructive behavior is especially effective among juveniles--a fast-growing segment of our population--many of whom are fatherless, have no fear of dying and no concept of living, and who seem mired in a culture marked by moral poverty and devoid of loving, responsible, and morally upright role models; faith-based approaches are especially effective at insulating criminally wayward but socially redeemable youth from the scourges of crime and drugs; and

WHEREAS, The hundreds of millions of dollars Texas spends on rehabilitative programs aimed at halting the revolving door of recidivism by improving job skills, boosting education, or defeating drug dependency are often unable to transform the inner person and reach offenders at a deep, redeeming level; and

WHEREAS, Faith-based rehabilitation and treatment programs offer a distinctly moral alternative to crime and prison life; such redemptive, healing and restitution-based programs steer offenders toward crime-free lives by providing a caring support community, stressing reconciliation, emphasizing accountability and community responsibilities, and extolling strong moral and family commitments, classroom instruction, counseling and peer support, and on-site vocational training; now, therefore, be it

RESOLVED, That the 75th Legislature of the State of Texas hereby urge the Texas Board of Criminal Justice, the Texas Youth Commission, the Texas Juvenile Probation Commission, and all Texas county commissioners and sheriffs to recognize the potency of these efforts and permit faith-based correctional programs, facilities, and initiatives to play a more significant role in the rehabilitation of criminal offenders by (i) encouraging more use of faith-based programming in public prisons and jails and treating such programs on the same basis as non-religious programs,

(ii) facilitating the operation of private, faith-based correctional facilities for willing inmates who are nearing release, and (iii) utilizing one-on-one faith-based programs that intervene in the lives of willing, nonviolent offenders to encourage positive behaviors by offering a structured and readjustive program of education and spiritual nurture as a positive alternative to incarceration or as a part of agreed-upon, post-incarceration aftercare; and, be it further

RESOLVED, That the secretary of state forward an official copy of this resolution to the chairman of the Texas Board of Criminal Justice, the chairman of the Texas Youth Commission, the chairman of the Texas Juvenile Probation Commission, and the county judge in each Texas county.

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President of the Senate

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Speaker of the House

I hereby certify that S.C.R. No. 44 was adopted by the Senate on May 20, 1997; and that the Senate concurred in House amendment on May 29, 1997.

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Secretary of the Senate

I hereby certify that S.C.R. No. 44 was adopted by the House, with amendment, on May 28, 1997.

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Chief Clerk of the House

Approved:

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Date

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Governor