



Declining offender population prompts unit closures, repurposing

Diversion and treatment programs funded by the legislature and successfully implemented by Texas Department of Criminal Justice staff has led to a steady decline in the number of offenders incarcerated by the agency. The decreased demand for secure housing and projected stability in offender population allowed the 85th Texas Legislature to reduce state spending through the closure of excess correctional capacity.



Jim Rudd Transfer Facility in Brownfield.

Consequently, the Correctional Institutions Division's Ware Transfer Facility in Colorado City and three privately operated facilities, the Bartlett State Jail, the West Texas Intermediate Sanction Facility and the Bridgeport Pre-Parole Transfer Facility, were closed during the summer of 2017.

As part of this transition, the Jim Rudd Transfer Facility in Brownfield was repurposed as an intermediate sanction facility for parole violators. Many of the West Texas ISF offenders were reassigned to the nearby Jim Rudd Transfer Facility, which was opened in

1995 and has been accredited by the American Correctional Association (ACA) since 2006.

The number of secure facilities overseen by TDCJ began to decline in 2011 when the Central Unit in Fort Bend County was closed. This was followed by the termination of TDCJ operations at both the Dawson State Jail in Dallas and the Mineral Wells Pre-Parole Transfer Facility in 2013, and the closure of the South Texas ISF in Houston in 2016. The current round of closings in 2017 brings the total number of facilities shut down since 2011 to eight.

Several agency divisions and departments worked in coordination to ensure the unit closures and conversions went smoothly. CID Offender Transportation relocated hundreds of offenders while maintaining security, and at the same time the Manufacturing, Agribusiness and Logistics Division transported necessary supplies and materials. CID Classification and Records staff screened and monitored offender transfers to avoid potential capacity problems, and the agency's Information Technology Division reprogrammed staff telephones and computer systems. TDCJ's Facilities Division retrofitted unit areas as needed, and Laundry and Food Service staff worked with unit maintenance to maintain critical support services.

The Ware Unit, located in Colorado City and co-located with TDCJ's Wallace Unit, was

established in 1997 and had been accredited by the ACA since 2007. By mid-August the offenders housed at the Ware Unit had been relocated to the other available beds within TDCJ based on their security classification, medical needs and programming requirements.



Ware Transfer Facility in Colorado City.

The Human Resources Division worked extensively in support of all unit closures, to include informing affected staff about the process and assisting with reassignments. Almost all Ware Unit employees took advantage of the opportunity to continue working within TDCJ. The HR division's efforts included holding hiring seminars at each of the private facilities prior to their closure to actively recruit qualified men and women. TDCJ hired six displaced employees from the West Texas ISF and 24 from the Bartlett State Jail. The private facility vendors offered their displaced employees transfers to their company's other locations.

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In addition to the logistical challenges associated with closing a unit, a wide assortment of administrative and operational challenges had to be overcome when converting a transfer facility, where offenders undergo a comprehensive intake process before being assigned to a CID unit, to an Intermediate Sanction Facility, which is a secure facility that provides an alternative to revocation for some parolees and probationers. During these conversions, the Correctional Institutions Division worked with the Rehabilitation Programs Division's Chaplaincy Department and the Windham School District to ensure sufficient offender treatment and education services were available. The WSD assumed responsibility for the cognitive intervention rehabilitation classes which were previously provided by a vendor. CID Classification and Records oversaw the transition from transfer facility to ISF intake procedures, and unit staff coordinated with the Parole Division and CID Offender Transportation to make sure ISF offenders were transported on schedule.

As with all offender transfers, providing for the safety of the public, agency staff and offenders was the overriding goal. Security was maintained and essential daily services were

provided throughout the process of closing and converting facilities. TDCJ Executive Director Bryan Collier applauded agency staff for their successful efforts. Staff members who live and work in the path of Hurricane Harvey, so in addition to the SECC we will be providing information about

"Because our staff routinely performs difficult work in a challenging environment, it's easy to take their accomplishments for granted," said Collier. "But handling all the operational and logistical issues associated with unit closures and repurposing of facilities without incident or disruption of services needs to be recognized for the achievement it is. Thanks to all the staff who contributed, and thanks to every TDCJ employee for their public service." ▲