



Texas Catholic Conference of Bishops

THE PUBLIC POLICY VOICE OF THE CHURCH

Support access to chaplains for prisoners

HB 1579 (White) | SB 654 (Bettencourt/Lucio/Springer)

The TCCB supports criminal justice reform that provides for compassionate treatment of prisoners, responds to the needs of victims of crime, and encourages rehabilitation and forgiveness for those re-entering society. Bills filed this session address both the overall need for prisoners to have access to spiritual support and the specific concerns of those awaiting capital punishment.

SUPPORT ACCESS TO CHAPLAINS FOR PRISONERS



"I also pray for... chaplains, and for your ministry which is difficult... it expresses one of the works of mercy: to make the Lord's presence visible in the prison... You are a sign of the closeness of Christ to these brothers who are in need of hope."
-Pope Francis

RELIGIOUS FREEDOM IS ESSENTIAL,
public policy needs to ensure this freedom for all, including to those incarcerated.



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Chaplaincy services

This bill would require the adoption of a policy that protects the free exercise of religious rights of inmates by ensuring access to volunteer and faith-based chaplains and chaplaincy services. The TCCB supports this bill to support religious freedom for the incarcerated. Key provisions include:

- Adding “chaplains” to the list of volunteer and faith-based organizations that can provide programs and services for inmates housed in facilities operated by the Texas Department of Criminal Justice (TDCJ).
- Requiring TDCJ to ensure chaplains are able to (1) conduct religious services, (2) provide pastoral care or spiritual guidance, and (3) otherwise support inmates who wish to receive or participate in those programs or services.
- Recognizing limitations on right of access to chaplains in situations where they are not available or if it would endanger the safety or security of the facility.
- Recognizing remedy for an inmate whose free exercise of religion has been “substantially burdened” by a TDCJ policy either via an inmate grievance system or any other remedy allowed by law.
- Additional reporting requirements for the warden to include documentation on claim, defense, or legal action arising from an alleged violation of inmate’s rights or any accommodation made, or remedy undertaken, to resolve the claim.

I also pray for you, who are chaplains, and for your ministry which is difficult, it is very demanding and very important since it expresses one of the works of mercy: to make the Lord’s presence visible in the prison, in the prison cell. You are a sign of the closeness of Christ to these brothers who are in need of hope.”

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Pope Francis, Oct. 23, 2013

Care for our incarcerated brothers and sisters is an integral part of the Catholic faith. No one knows this more than the Catholic priests, sisters, deacons, and lay persons who minister to them.

The Texas Catholic Conference of Bishops is the association of the Roman Catholic bishops of Texas. The TCCB represents 16 dioceses and 20 active bishops. Through the TCCB, the bishops provide a moral and social public policy voice, accredit the state's Catholic schools, and maintain archives that reflect the work and the history of the Catholic Church in Texas.