

HED: Proposed bill contradicts inmates' rights

By Richard Sirman

richard.sirman@madisonvillemeteor.com

Representative Bryan Slaton of District 2 of Texas filed HB 1438 to improve the safety and security of Texas Prisons to empower the Texas Department of Criminal Justice to install cellular jamming devices in Texas prisons on Wednesday, January 18.

According to the press release, this will ensure that prisons in the state will increase safety for corrections officers while helping to facilitate the end of contraband cell phones used in criminal activities.

Director of Communications for TDCJ Amanda Hernandez wrote on cellphones in prison, stating, "Cellphones are not allowed inside TDCJ facilities and inmates having contraband cell phones is a growing issue inside of our facilities."

Though she would mention that inmates can have tablets inside the facilities provided by the prison by a company known as Securus Technologies; they provide the tablets at no cost to the inmates and the state.

According to Hernandez, these tablets are in the process of being rolled out to other prisons across the state, and they offer an array of activities for the inmates, "These secure tablets provide a range of content including education, religious and legal material. Inmates can add monitored messaging and phone services, as well as music and select entertainment through subscription plans," said Hernandez

The premise of installing the cell phone jamming devices, as Slaton calls them, is to draw away the hardened criminal from "illegal activities such as drug trafficking, sex trafficking, escapes, and perhaps most importantly, making it much more difficult for hardened criminals to plan attacks against the men and women who work at our prisons and their families," per Slaton's release.

However, the knowledge that these inmates in prison have access to tablets that are apparently under a secure network and will not be affected by these proposed towers brings the proposed bill into question.

If the bill is targeting the supposed crimes from occurring and if the tablets have monitored messaging and phone services, as well as music, who's to say that inmates in prison couldn't make up a system to continue their supposed criminal activities with their tablets?

With that being said, the whole system seems to unfold and becomes quite contradictory; on one side, the government wants to eliminate the issue of having contraband like cell phones in prison, while on the other hand is willing to send out tablets to inmates in prison.

According to the TDCJ website, these tablets will be maintained through a secure internal network without internet access, and 35 out of the 98 units already have the infrastructure to run this new tablet system.

But according to the website, this contract that TDCJ has signed has additional upgrades for infrastructure for all of their units at no cost to the agency. So, the systems will be in place in the next couple of months.

When more information comes out about this proposed bill, the Madisonville Meteor will cover it, so make sure to subscribe to the paper to stay up to date.