

PITCH: HELP WANTED (IN PRISON)

By: Avery Goodman

HEADLINE: Texas Recruits High School Kids To Become Corrections Officers

PITCH: Hundreds of high schools in Texas offer classes focused on preparing students for careers in law enforcement, including working in corrections. In hopes to ease its severe staffing shortage in prisons, the Texas Department of Criminal Justice has hired a recruiter to develop relationships within these high school training programs.

VIDEO ELEMENTS:

Videos of students/teachers during lessons in these classes

Videos of corrections officers that went through these programs Videos of Texas prisons

Stills related to the amount of Texas high schools with these programs Stills related to the shortage of staff in Texas Prisons

CHARACTERS:

1. Jordan Huebner: Former student of Huntsville High School and current leader of their criminal justice program. Huntsville is Texas' most famous "prison town."
2. Andrew Mireles: Graduated from Huntsville High School's criminal justice program and worked at Walker County Jail when he was 18.
3. BennyKinsey: Director of Recruitment and Retention for the Texas Department of Criminal Justice.
4. Ryann Kaaa-Bauer: Former police officer and current teacher for the Huntsville High training program.
5. Director of Communications Amanda Hernandez.
6. Kiara Guley and Rodney Harper: students in the training program at a high school in Palestine, Texas

NEWS PEG/DEADLINE:

Evergreen

BACKGROUND/SOURCE LINKS:

Reporting: <https://www.themarshallproject.org/2023/06/26/prison-texas-high-school-corrections-officers>

Reporting: <https://dailyyonder.com/prison-generation-how-the-texas-dept-of-criminal-justice-recruits-future-staff-from-high-schools/2023/06/26/>

About the program: <https://tea.texas.gov/academics/college-career-and-military-prep/career-and-technical-education/lawenforcement-programofstudy2020.pdf>

<https://tea.texas.gov/academics/college-career-and-military-prep/career-and-technical-education/lps-law-enforcement.pdf>

<https://www.txcte.org/course-binder/correctional-services>

Directory of Youth Law Enforcement Experience Programs:

<https://lapsen.org/searchable-program-directory/>

More about Huntsville Prisons: <https://www.themarshallproject.org/2022/02/10/rise-and-fall-of-a-prison-town-queen>

Mental health effects: <https://news.berkeley.edu/2018/08/23/california-correctional-officers-at-high-risk-for-depression-ptsd-and-suicide-new-survey-finds/>

Eligibility criteria for corrections officers:

<https://www.tdcj.texas.gov/divisions/hr/coinfo/emp-co.html>

Statistics:

Staffing Shortage:

<https://www.prisonlegalnews.org/news/2023/jan/1/guards-fleeing-texas-prisons/#:~:text=According%20to%20a%20March%202022,higher%20still%2C%20at%2040.3%25.>

<https://stateline.org/2022/09/26/prison-staff-shortages-take-toll-on-guards-incarcerated-people/>

Incarceration trends in Texas:

<https://www.vera.org/downloads/pdfdownloads/state-incarceration-trends-texas.pdf>

How bad is the shortage: The Texas Department of Criminal Justice says that over a quarter of its 23,600 jobs are unfilled, and while the Texas prison agency hires between 8,000 and 10,000 new guards each year, it has a turnover rate of 45%. According to a report from March 2022 by the Texas State Auditor, the state Juvenile Justice

Department had a staff turnover rate of 47.2% and Juvenile Correctional Officers turned over at a rate of 71%.

How many students are enrolling: In the 2021-2022 school year, almost [162,000](#) students had enrolled in this career-training program, making it the biggest of its kind in the country. According to the Texas Education Agency, 69,973 students concentrated in the Law, Public Safety, Corrections, and Security Program of Study. There are 3,500 law and public safety programs nationwide. More than [2,500](#) Texas teens every year take classes focused on working in prisons and jails, studying subjects that include how to restrain prisoners and administer first aid in a prison setting.

Success rate/how it's going: According to the Texas Education Agency, only 11,007 of the 69,973 enrolled students were completers in this program or study. According to Jordan Huebner, former Huntsville High School student and current leader of their program, at least 10% of her students will work in corrections in their lifetime.

What's next for the program: In 2023, states will receive \$1.4 billion in [federal funding](#) to support career and technical education programs in [16 fields](#). The Texas Education Agency's programs of study are currently in a [refresh phase](#) with proposed updates for public comment.

People opposing this: Right now, not much information on the opposition from activists per se, but [many students](#) enrolled in the programs had a problem with its focus on corrections as they joined the program due to interest in other jobs. There's also [studies](#) to show the mental health effects of becoming corrections officers.