

Resolving TDCJ's HVAC Infrastructure Liabilities

KEY TAKEAWAYS

- Extreme heat in TDCJ's inmate housing areas are among those most pressing long-term challenges facing the agency, made only more urgent with the recent ruling and order from a federal district court last week.
- The longer Texas has its officers and incarcerated Texans working and living in these conditions, the longer Texas taxpayers will foot the bill for medical costs, staff turnover, and ongoing litigation.
- The availability of recently released federal funds make funding the remainder of the TDCJ units that lack climate control more feasible.
- In addition to funding Exceptional Item #4(a), the Legislature should appropriate an additional \$1.2 billion to finish the job of installing AC in prisons by the end of the decade.

BACKGROUND

Nearly 75,000 beds at 45 TDCJ prisons and jails lack climate control. This means that tens of thousands of incarcerated Texans and the public safety professionals who work there are exposed to extreme heat in the summer months. Among incarcerated Texans, studies have repeatedly shown that extreme heat contributes to increased violence, suicidality, and mortality. Among correctional officers, extreme heat contributes to excessive turnover rates and exposes them to heat-related illness and increased risk of violent encounters. TDCJ estimated in March 2026 that design and construction of AC for these 75,000 beds would cost \$1.5 billion over the next four fiscal years.

74,908

estimated # of TDCJ beds that will lack AC over the next four years

Texas 2036 analysis of TDCJ publications and court filings

PROPOSED ACTION

Texas 2036 supports the the adoption of TDCJ Exceptional Item #4(a), appropriating \$298 million in FY 2028 for the installation of HVAC systems covering 15,742 beds. Texas 2036 also supports the appropriation of funds (estimated to be an additional \$1.2 billion) to allow TDCJ to obligate as much as possible for the 2028-29 biennium for the remaining 59,166 beds, pursuant to TDCJ's March 2026 estimates and the recent court order to complete installation by December 31, 2029.

Recently released federal border security funds could serve as a method of finance for fully funding the \$1.5 billion cost. A one-time federal reimbursement like this is best utilized for critical, targeted, one-time expenditures, and a capital project of this scale is a good fit.

BUDGET COST ESTIMATE

\$1.5 billion in FY 2028-29 and FY 2030-31; estimated \$23.2 million in out-years for ongoing maintenance of HVAC systems.

PUBLIC POLICY IMPACT

Completing the installation of HVAC systems in all of TDCJ's facilities will obviate the need for other costly heat mitigation strategies, reduce correctional staff turnover, reduce medical expenses from heat-related injuries, illnesses, and deaths, and relieve the state of a persistent source of legal liability and cost.

FOR ADDITIONAL INFORMATION, PLEASE CONTACT

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