FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

February 25, 2013

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**NEW REPORT FROM TEXAS COALITION CALLS FOR CLOSURE OF DAWSON STATE JAIL**

*Austin, TX* - A coalition of groups representing criminal justice, civil liberties, policy, and faith organizations released a report today, detailing abuses at the privately-run Dawson State Jail in Dallas and outlining further rationale for closing the facility. The report is co-authored by Texas-based Grassroots Leadership and The Sentencing Project, a national organization working for a fair and effective U.S. criminal justice system. The full report is online at [www.grassrootsleadership.org/DawsonStateJail](http://www.grassrootsleadership.org/DawsonStateJail).

“Dawson has a well-documented history of neglect of incarcerated people, in many cases resulting in death,” said Kymberlie Quong Charles of Grassroots Leadership.  “Unfortunately, these problems are common in prisons run for profit by corporations. How many more people will have to die before this facility is closed?”

The report’s recommendations urge lawmakers not to renew the state’s contract for the Dawson State Jail, a privately operated state jail in downtown Dallas. The prison is operated by Corrections Corporation of America, the country’s oldest and largest for-profit private prison corporation. The report calls on the state to zero out funding for the facility and dedicate resources towards more robust forms of community supervision for those convicted of state jail felonies to further reduce the state jail population.

Michelle Smith, Civil Rights Fellow at the Texas Civil Rights Project said, “We know Dawson State Jail has had at least five deaths in the last five years and obviously things need to change. The inmates there are not getting adequate medical attention, because if they were, they wouldn't be dying. If things don’t change, CCA and TDCJ will face more lawsuits about the unconstitutional conditions there.”

The report notes that the state jail population has declined by 15 percent from 2007 to 2012. Senator John Whitmire, Chair of the Senate Criminal Justice Committee, has recently argued in favor of closing Dawson State Jail and other contract beds noting that TDCJ has up to 10,000 empty beds in the state prison system.

"Texas should continue its efforts to safely reduce its prison population,” said Dr. Ana Yáñez-Correa, Executive Director of the Texas Criminal Justice Coalition. “Closing a facility like the Dawson State Jail would save tax payer dollars that can be better spent on programs that work.”

The coalition also announced a March 7th vigil at the Dawson State Jail in Dallas on the eve of International Women’s Day.

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**Select Quotes from Criminal Justice Reform Leaders on *Dawson: The Case for Closure***

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“Dawson has a well-documented history of neglect of incarcerated people, in many cases resulting in death. Unfortunately, these problems are common in prisons run for profit by corporations. How many more people will have to die before this facility is closed?” - Kymberlie Quong Charles, National Organizer, Grassroots Leadership

"We can talk about the need to close Dawson State Jail from a public safety or public health perspective.  We can talk about it from a cost savings and efficiencies perspective.  But as people of faith, we must make clear that privatizing prisons, and thereby incarcerating people for the purpose of generating corporate profits, is immoral and contrary to the teachings of Abrahamic and non-Abrahamic faith traditions.  By their very nature, private prisons and jails do not have the incentives to support reform or rehabilitation.  It is our view that in a humane society, there are some things that can never be for sale.' - Rev. T. Randall Smith, Texas Impact Board President

"As a professional organization, we do not condone the cruel and unethical treatment of persons incarcerated for legal infractions.  AFSCME Texas Correctional Employees seeks to increase standards in training and development of correctional professionals who are the keepers of the society's kept.  The Texas inmate populations are diverse in mental and health issues, making it critical for proper staffing to care for this increasing segment of our prison population.  As Texans and leaders of the free world, we need to set a higher standard as a model for the humane treatment of people."

 -Lance Lowry, President AFSCME Texas Correctional Employees

"While the Texas Jail Project is an organization working to improve *county* jails, we have heard numerous complaints over the past four years about the Dawson State Jail.  These complaints include the lack of programs, the lack of access to the out doors, and most of all, the poor medical care of people incarcerated there," said Texas Jail Project director Diana Claitor.  "After the death of Pamela Weatherby, it became obvious that the state of Texas had abdicated its responsibility for the lives of Texans locked up in this privately run hellhole. It should have been closed then and we support the movement to close it now." - Diana Claitor, Director, Texas Jail Project

“State lawmakers have an opportunity to continue the prison downsizing trend observed in other states -- including Texas. Too many persons with low-level offenses have been incarcerated for excessive prison terms at great cost. Increasing numbers of lawmakers are now recognizing the problems caused by such policies.” - Nicole D. Porter, Director of Advocacy, The Sentencing Project

“The tragic incidents that occurred at Dawson State Jail should have never happened. We have great concerns about the abuse & inhumane treatment of the inmates especially when you consider that African Americans are disproportionately represented in jails. It is our hope that Legislators will listen to the recommendations made in the report and act accordingly.” - Yannis Banks, Legislative Liaison, Texas NAACP

“Media reports indicate a dramatic lack of appropriate medical care for inmates in the Dawson State Jail. Such outright inattentiveness suggests that the facility is failing to provide appropriate services under its contract with the state of Texas and may even be creating liability for Texas taxpayers by unconstitutionally housing non-violent offenders.” - Matt Simpson, ACLU of Texas

"Texas should continue its efforts to safely reduce its prison population. Closing a facility like the Dawson State Jail would save tax payer dollars that can be better spent on programs that work.” - Dr. Ana Yáñez-Correa, Executive Director of the Texas Criminal Justice Coalition

“The physical neglect and the unjust treatment does not just harm inmates at Dawson State Jail, it adversely impacts their families as well. When an inmate goes to prison the event and separation has a devastating affect on family members. But for the hope of a reunion to be shattered by a death due to neglect is unconscionable!” – Jennifer Ershabek, Executive Director, Texas Inmate Family Association