

The following is the full text of a series of questions sent by The Marshall Project to Texas prison spokesman Jeremy Desel. Portions of the answers are included in the [investigative story published Aug. 11 in conjunction with Texas Monthly](#), but the answers in their entirety are included below. Some additional background has been added to the questions for context.

Q: More than a dozen current and former staff and a half dozen prisoners have described to me how prisoners can defeat the locking mechanisms and have been doing so periodically, at several different units for years. Is this something that the agency has tried to address or do you have any comment on it?

A: The issue of lock manipulation could not be taken more seriously. No matter where you are in TDCJ or in prison systems around the country it is known that electronic lock systems have the ability to be manipulated if they are not diligently inspected and maintained. We do that constantly. Anytime there is an incident or even evidence of an attempt of a lock being manipulated that is reported immediately to the highest levels of the agency. If a lock is manipulated it is considered an emergency situation and technicians are immediately dispatched to not only correct the issue on that lock, but also to inspect all nearby locks.

Q: I have several descriptions from prisoners of assaults and other violence taking place as the result of people popping the locks on their cells. Was this issue considered a security risk?

A: It is a security risk of the highest priority. (In a recent incident there were a number of locks that were manipulated which allowed offenders out of their cells. The same locks unmanipulated kept another offender who was the intended target of an attack unharmed.)

Q: I understand that one solution is to retrofit doors with steel cover plates - do you know what units this has been done on already and/or why it hasn't been done everywhere?

If it were as simple as a steel plate those would be everywhere. There are no solutions that are 100% free from manipulation, however we have several projects in pilot stages that aim to make lock manipulation even more difficult.

Q: Do you have any response to the following comment from union official Lance Lowry? "Manipulation of locks is nothing new. Officer deaths and assaults are just not a priority for the agency."

A: To suggest that officer deaths and assaults are not a priority to TDCJ is not just false it is completely offensive to all who selflessly serve the state of Texas. Such a comment speaks more to the individual making its lack of knowledge or care about correctional officers and this agency.

Q: I have been given a copy of your capital expenditure plan for the current biennium and it included \$8 million lock replacements at Byrd and Clements. Have those been completed?

A: They are in progress and part of a years long process of upgrading manual locking systems at units.

Q: There is also \$5 million in "security retrofits" at "various" units. Is that related to fixing of locks?

A: Those are upgrades to security systems at units to provide more cool beds for heat sensitive offenders.