March was a month for making connections as a number of TIFA members from across the state gathered in Austin to meet with legislators. Travelling from as far away as San Antonio, Fort Worth, and Houston more than a dozen members met in a reserved room of the state capitol to discuss concerns they would like to see addressed by our representatives at this 84th legislative session.

A variety of prison related issues were put on the table to be scrutinized by the members in attendance before we actually went to talk with representatives. Raylene Truxton chaired the preliminary meeting with TIFA Executive Director Jennifer Erschabek and TIFA Secretary Rita Castro in attendance. Many of the legislators were meeting with their respective committees but several members did get an opportunity to meet personally with State Rep. Abel Herrero, chairman of the Criminal Jurisprudence Committee. Ms. Erschabek explained TIFA’s position on various issues including the need to support HB 3303 which calls for an independent oversight agency. This independent agency would be charged with investigating, evaluating and securing the rights of individuals in TDCJ. It would also create transparency and accountability in the way TDCJ operates. She also emphasized TIFA’s unwavering stance on the abolition of the death penalty. Transparency of parole board practices and procedures was also a topic of discussion at the meeting. Unfortunately, this truly important issue is not currently on the agenda for this legislative session. But with so many members in attendance from across the state many promising connections were made with the goal of creating legislation to be introduced at the next legislative session in 2017.

Some of the other Representatives contacted include Rep. Leighton Schubert, who also sits on the Criminal Jurisprudence Committee, Sen. Jose Menendez, a member of the senate Criminal Justice Committee, and Rep. Joe Farias of San Antonio.

One of our newest members, Gary Hunter, brings a new perspective to the table. Gary was released from TDCJ two years ago after spending over 24 years inside. He has been writing for Prison Legal News Magazine for the last 15 years and now owns and operates his own paralegal business. He is committed to using his knowledge of the law, the political process and writing skills to take TIFA’s efforts to the next level.

Many TIFA members have labored feverishly to convince our elected officials to vote favorably on issues that would benefit our incarcerated loved ones. But this year’s efforts had a different flavor than times past. Beyond just the regular phone calls and meetings, many TIFA members have resolved to devote their efforts to the creation of bills to be introduced at the 85th legislative session in 2017. Our goal is to address such vital topics as work time credit for 3g offenders and more transparency in the parole process. But we can’t do it without your help.

TIFA needs YOU to get involved. We need your ideas, your input and of course your financial support. Please look for the TIFA meeting closest to you and join us in supporting our incarcerated family members. Help us help them. Visit www.tifa.org to join or donate. We are also on Facebook.
Message from the Executive Director, Jennifer Erschabek

The idea of limited government and a citizen Legislature underscores the way that Texas makes its laws. Thousands of bills are filed each session and only about 20% are passed because there are a thousand ways to kill a bill, and only one or two ways to pass it.

With that said, many people have been working long hours on criminal justice issues but unfortunately, at this point, most are now ‘stuck’ in committee, and time is running out. Some of the bills we are working and watching closely include the bill relating to Independent Oversight, the Fair Chance Policy bills relating to the consideration of criminal history record information and a bill that will update minor property and possession offenses placing individuals on probation rather than sending them to prison.

With all the lessons learned this session TIFA will be starting early for the 85th session. There is a group of people, both inside and outside of TDCJ who will be working on ‘work time credits’ toward parole eligibility. In the interim, we will continue working on building relationships and educating Texans on why this makes sense.

Advantages of earned time credit for all offenders:
- gives the parole board a way to assure a degree of equity of punishment among offenders
- reinforces TDCJ’s ability to keep order and encourages positive institutional behavior
- saves the state government millions of dollars
- brings families back together

Message from TIFA Chair, Patti Kassel

5 Things you can do to support your loved one-

Let’s face it, they don’t give us a book on how to support our loved one once they are incarcerated. Most of us said, now what do I do? Over the years, I have tried to come up with some creative ways to show my loved one he’s not been forgotten. Here are just a few ways.

1. Send an email asking friends & family to send cards on birthday and holidays.
2. Set up a www.JPay.com account. Purchase stamps and when you read something that your loved one would enjoy, cut and paste into a JPay.com email to send to them. Tip…if your email is long and takes 2 stamps, you can change the text to a smaller size to save a stamp.
3. Surprise your loved one with a small amount of special treats from eComm Direct. https://tdcj-ecommdirect.portal.texas.gov/
4. Take pictures of family, friends and areas around home or town. Get on a photo printing site, Walmart, Walgreens, CVS, etc. and send them to your loved one directly from the company. It’s cheap and fast. Keep an eye out for coupons too.
5. Create a photo book through one of the websites available. I recently used www.mixbook.com, but there are many others out there. I also asked family and friends to get involved by having them hold up special messages in their pictures.

Share some of your ideas with us at tifa@tifa.org. We will post them in the next issues of TIFA Contact. You might see them on Facebook too.

TIFA Contact

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TIFA is a non-profit 501 (c)(3) of the U.S. Internal Revenue Code. Membership in TIFA is open to anyone. A Basic membership is $25 per year and includes one newsletter subscription to the member address. A Basic Plus membership of $35 per year includes all family members residing in one household and the inmate newsletter.

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And you can find us on Facebook.

Note: We read all mail that is received but cannot answer every letter. Our mission is strengthening families through support, education and advocacy.
In March the Tyler area held a planning meeting to discuss reorganizing a TIFA chapter in the Tyler area. Twenty two people attended the planning meeting hosted by TIFA Board Member and Houston Chapter Chair David Collingsworth and TIFA Board Member and Humble Chapter Chair Sharon Bass. David and Sharon explained to the eager group the requirements for opening a chapter. Three members quickly followed on April 11th at Freedom Fellowship Church. The attendees each introduced themselves and shared information about their loved ones and what their hopes were for the Tyler chapter.

The first chapter meeting was held on April 11th at Freedom Fellowship Church. The attendees each introduced themselves and shared information about their loved ones and what their hopes were for the Tyler chapter.

TIFA strongly encourages members to form local Chapters. One of the many benefits of a local chapter is the mutual support among its members. TIFA members understand and meetings give members the opportunity to be able to share your experience, listen to someone else’s, or just be that shoulder needed to cry on.

Another important aspect of local chapters is educating the public. Many of the problems in the Texas criminal justice system can be traced directly to stereotypes, myths, and misconceptions about crime and prisons. One of our goals is to educate the public about the true nature of the crime problems in our communities and the horrible waste of human lives that the criminal justice system perpetuates. Just the very existence of a local Chapter can help to change the public’s perceptions about the system and the people who are most affected by it.

If you would like information on how to organize a chapter, the TIFA office is only a phone call or email away. Call 512-371-0900 or email tifa@tifa.org

Know Your Rights
by Bill Cook - Pearland Chapter

Te’iva Johnson Bell from the Harris County Public Defender’s Office was the guest speaker at the February Pearland Chapter meeting. She did a presentation on “Know Your Rights”.

When stopped by the police:
• Be Polite & Non-Confrontational.
• Show your identification if it’s requested.
• Keep Private Items Out of View.
• NEVER consent to a search, even if you don’t have anything to hide.
• Unless you are being arrested, walk away, POLITELY.
• Remain Silent and ask for an attorney. Do not answer questions without a lawyer representing you present. If the officer continues to talk after you ask for an attorney that usually indicates he/she is not going to follow the rules.

Other good things to know:
• TEACH your KIDS to say “I will not talk without an attorney.”
• Schools are different. Schools are like “The Momma Zone”, whatever your Momma can do at home, the school can do.
• Juveniles are different; parents do not need to be present for a juvenile to be questioned.
• Age difference between juveniles as sex partners is 3 years.

Tips for interacting with officers when on parole:
• Parolee MUST identify to the officer that they are on parole.
• Sometimes the officer is much nicer because he/she doesn’t know what you are on parole for.
• If you are roughed up, you MUST maintain respect and politeness. You may go to jail, but at the first opportunity, file a Complaint.

TDCJ Quarterly Meeting - Education

The TDCJ Quarterly Meeting was held in Huntsville on Feb 27 and the topic of discussion was education. Dr. Clint Carpenter presented updates from Windham and a representative from Reentry gave updates from the community colleges. Dr Carpenter discussed some of the new vocational classes and certifications that are being offered.

Listed below are the industry certifications and licenses that can now be earned by students in TDCJ:
• Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA)
• National Center for Construction Education and Research (NCCE)
• Automotive Service Excellence (ASE)
• Electronics Technicians Association (ETA)
• ServSafe
• Cleaning Management Institute (CMI)
• Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) 608
• Texas Nursery and Landscape Association (TNLA) Endorsement
• National Appliance Service Technician (NASTc)
• Outdoor Power Equipment and Engine

Quarterly (Continued on page 4)
after the Seminary program at the Angola penitentiary in Angola, Louisiana. As a result of their Seminary, its private funding, and their state officials allowing the effort, their violence rate has dropped nearly 75%.

The Angola Model, now proven to be a major element in penal reform, is basically this:

- The Seminary students are made up ONLY of “lifers” and other inmates with extremely long sentences.
- The graduates of the Seminary won’t be getting out when they graduate; they will stay inside the system, and help transform the system from the inside out.
- Inmates listen to their own; they give far greater credence to the voice of their own than they do to the voices of free-world volunteers.
- The Seminary students, upon graduation, will be sent to other prisons in the state, where they will serve on the staffs of the prison Chaplains. They will assist those Chaplains in their individual prison ministries. Their very presence will begin to change the culture of the prisons to which they are assigned.

Ms. Erschabek and Ms. Truxton had first been invited to the Darrington Unit by the Seminary College in the summer of 2014 to give an overview presentation of TIFA. After the presentation they stayed and visited with the men and answered many, many questions. At the end of their visit Ms. Erschabek was asked if TIFA would share the TIFA Parole Workshop materials so that the Darrington Seminary graduates could one day give parole workshops to others at the TDCJ units located around the state. Ms. Erschabek stated “We are very pleased and excited to be working with this great group of men and to be able to share something that will benefit so many in the system. TIFA looks forward to a long lasting relationship with the Seminary graduates and will assist whenever we are asked.”

The Darrington Seminary is funded by The Heart of Texas Foundation, sponsored by The Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary and is a free program for those who are chosen to participate. It is a state-wide effort to permanently improve the culture in the Texas Prison System from the bottom up by showing the shorter-term inmates the difference between right and wrong and good and bad behavior.

The Darrington program is modeled after the Seminary program at the Angola penitentiary in Angola, Louisiana. As a result of their Seminary, its private funding, and their state officials allowing the effort, their violence rate has dropped nearly 75%.

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Need Information About TDCJ

Occasionally we all need to make a phone call to get some information or to resolve an issue with TDCJ. Listed below are some of the common subjects and contact information.

**Offender Locator/General Information:** - Huntsville, (936) 295-6371, or (800) 535-0283

**Offender Protection Issues (OPI):** Immediately contact a security supervisor; warden; assistant; or the Classification Department at the unit.

**Medical Care:** The unit physician is the primary care provider at the unit level and is responsible for the determination of medical treatments, medications, medical restrictions, and scheduling of services. Your loved one (LO) should attempt to resolve a medical problem at the unit level first by contacting the unit medical administrator in writing (sick call request or I-60 request form). Subsequently, if your LO is not in agreement with the provider’s response they may utilize the grievance process. Your LO will not be transferred for medical reasons without the approval and recommendation of unit health care providers. The TDCJ Patient Liaison Program (PLP) Family/Public PO Box 99, Huntsville, Tx 77342-0099. **Patient Liaison Program Family Hotline** (936) 437-4271. (Your LO will have to sign a medical release for someone to talk to you about their medical issues.)

**Corrections Managed Health Care (CMHC) (936) 437-3125; Galveston Hospital Family Hot Line (409) 772-6131 (24 to 48 turnaround time); Medical Hospital Visitation Hot Line (409) 772-5726.**

**Mental Health:** Treatment programs are provided for offenders with mental health needs. Mental Health Services Office of Inspector General (OIG) Investigations: Complaints or allegations relating to excessive or unreported use of force, physical harm by staff, or any crime committed by an offender or employee on state property should be directed to the Office of the Inspector General P.O. Box 13084, Capitol Station, Austin, TX 78711 (512) 671-2480 For Complaints: (936) 437-5030. Full details must be provided in order to initiate an investigation in the manner.

**Classification:** Issues related to time disputes; time calculations, sentencing; concurrent time and stack time; jail time; forfeited good conduct time; back dated good conduct time; class; promotions, cell assignment; or information on various programs should be directed to the Classification Chief at the unit OR the Classification & Records Department at PO Box 99, Huntsville, TX 77342-0099. (936) 437-6231

**Transfer:** Offenders are not at liberty to choose their unit of assignment. Notify the Classification Department at the unit if you have a reason that warrants a transfer. A request for a hardship transfer may be made if an immediate family member, listed on the approved visitation list, is unable to travel long distances. To be considered, your LO must be at least L1/G3, with no major disciplinary cases for 1 year and more than 200 miles from home. A family member may submit their request along with a letter from their doctor to verify the medical disability to TDCJ Classifications & Records Department at PO Box 99, Huntsville, TX 77342-0099. (936) 437-6231. A transfer is not guaranteed, but the request will be reviewed for consideration.

**Religion:** Any issue related to religious programs; services; holidays; or activities should be directed through the Chaplain at the unit or the TDCJ Chaplaincy Department at PO Box 99, Huntsville, TX, 77342-0099. (938) 437-3039.

**Parole review status:** (prior to being voted by the BPP to be released) - Board of Pardons and Paroles status line at (844) 512-0461. PO Box 13401, Capitol Station, Austin, TX 78711.

**Parole release status:** (after being voted by the BPP to be released) - Parole Division status line in Austin (512) 406-5202.

**Education:** Issues related to education should be directed to the Windham School Principal at the unit. Continuing Education issues should be directed to Windham School at PO Box 40, Huntsville, Tx, 77342. (936) 291-5303. You will not be considered for educational transfer without Windham recommendation.

**Trust Fund & Commissary:** Issues related to a commissary account should be directed to Inmate Trust Fund at PO Box 629 Huntsville, TX 77342. (936) 437-4700. Issues related to commissary purchase, items stocked, or special requests should be directed to the commissary supervisor at the unit. For trust fund deposit slips, send a self-addressed, stamped envelope to Inmate Trust Fund, PO Box 60, Huntsville, Texas 77342-0060 or request them after your unit visit. (936) 437-4700.

**Offender Telephone System:** For problems with the phone system, **Information** (Continued on page 6)
contact the following, in writing: TDCJ – Information Technology Division Offender Telephone System Contract Manager P.O. Box 4016 Huntsville, TX 77342-4016 or Email: offenderphones@tdcj.state.tx.us (936) 437-1490.

Food Service: Issues related to meals, sack lunches, or special diet menus should be sent to the food service manager for resolution at the unit. If the issue is not resolved at the unit level, then contact the Director of Food Service at PO Box 99, Huntsville, TX 77342-0099 (936) 437-8310 or your LO can use the Grievance Procedure.

Legal Assistance: Issues such as conviction appeal, detainers, divorce, or child support should be directed to an offender’s attorney. For indigent offenders, contact State Counsel for Offenders, Legal Services Section at PO Box 4005, Huntsville, TX 77342-4005. (936) 437-5203.

Law Library: All offender legal issues related to unit operations such as, access to courts; legal visits with other offenders; free world attorney visits; indigent, legal or correspondence supplies; postage; policy; and state law information requests should be directed to the law library. (936) 437-4815. If your LO disagrees with a response from the law library staff, they may utilize the Grievance Procedure.

Security Threat Group (STG): If your LO feels they have been incorrectly identified as a member of a security threat group, or wants to begin the disassociation process, they should contact the Security Threat Group Office (STGMO) at PO Box 99, Huntsville, TX, 77342-0099. (936) 437-8924. However, the STG Management Office relies more on requests and information submitted to them by the Unit STGO than from offenders.

Lockdown & Shakedowns: Unfortunately offenders who had nothing to do with a disturbance are often included in a lockdown, and all offenders at a unit are affected by a semi-annual shakedown. The procedures for implementing a lockdown or shakedown are well established and have proven effective in restoring order and ensuring the security of the unit, as well as the safety of offenders and staff. That does not mean the process is pleasant for offenders or staff. If your LO feels procedures have violated policies, they may utilize the Grievance Procedure.

For a complete list of TDCJ phone numbers, visit the TDCJ Phone & Address Directory at http://www.tdcj.state.tx.us/connections/maintoc/annual_directory.pdf

Prison Grievances en Espanol: Quando Escribe, Como Escribe (Spanish Edition)

The graphic novel by Terri LeClercq, Prison Grievances: when to write, how to write is now available in English and Spanish. This educational graphic novel teaches offenders how to think through a prison problem and then write a grievance about it.

If your LO has issues, they may be formally addressed through the Offender Grievance Procedure if informal contact (verbally or I-60) with unit staff does not address the concerns. A Step 1 grievance should be submitted to the Grievance Department at your LO’s unit. Ample time should be allowed for the Grievance Department to investigate the complaint and return a reply. If an appeal to the decision to the next level is needed, a Step 2 grievance must be submitted along with the original answered Step 1 grievance to the Grievance Department at the unit. The Step 2 grievances are reviewed by the regional authority or the Central Grievance Office. Directing grievances to unrelated offices may result in expiration of the grievable time period.

If your LO wishes to comment on the effectiveness and credibility of the grievance procedure, they should write a letter or send an I-60 request form to the grievance investigator at the unit or to the Central Grievance Office at PO Box 99, Huntsville, TX 77342-0099. If your LO has already pursued the issue through the Offender Grievance Procedure at Step 1 and Step 2, and did not resolve the issue, you may have to help with a phone call to TDCJ.

Grievable Issues
- TDCJ policies and procedures
- Actions of an employee or another offender
- Harassment and/or retaliation for use of the grievance procedure or access to courts
- Loss or damage of personal property by TDCJ
- Basic care (things that TDCJ has control over)

Non-Grievable Issues
- State or Federal Laws
- Parole decisions
- Time-served credit disputes
- Matters for which other formal appeal-mechanisms exist
- Any matter beyond the control of TDCJ
Planning for Marriage in TDCJ

by Birdy Padron -
Houston Chapter

Congratulations on your engagement! With this year’s newest policy change, inmates and loved ones are seeing a new and exciting opportunity presented before us. In the past Texas inmates were only able to get married by proxy. Couples would be married by having the outside spouse have a substitute person step in, also known as a proxy, to represent the incarcerated spouse at the wedding ceremony. However Texas law changed in 2013 and inadvertently left the incarcerated with no means to get married during this time.

With the new administrative directive issued, TDCJ has introduced a much more personal way for inmates to be married. The bride and groom will meet in the visitation area one day during the week with an officiant or minister of their finding to help them say, “I do”, with a smile! We asked brides how they felt about being able to attend a ceremony inside TDCJ with their groom and here is one of the responses we heard.

“I think that I am more nervous that it is in person rather than by proxy. By designating a proxy it is someone that I am comfortable with, such as my friend or mom; but as of now, it will be with him in TDCJ and well, it makes it all the more real as if we were truly having a wedding ceremony like we would out here together. But it is also sad as well cause we can't share it with our families,” said Letty De Los Santos who is currently in the approval process to be married.

Though the ceremony is simple and will only be allowed to take 30 minutes, the process to get approval at your unit and prepare with the local county clerk’s office can be a bit complex. Here are 3 things that I recommend you do to prepare.

One - The incarcerated spouse must begin the unit process with an I-60 requesting a copy of their inmate identification card with a pre-addressed stamped envelope to their outside spouse. The identification card copy will be retained by the spouse to use at the local county clerk’s office when obtaining a marriage license. Please keep in mind the unit requires this as a preliminary step for marriage, however not all county clerk’s offices accept inmate identification as a proper form to obtain a marriage license. The outside spouse will need to determine if they have to obtain a different form of inmate identification or simply use a different county clerk’s office. I have personally found the larger counties in Texas to be more helpful, such as Harris, Travis, or Bexar counties.

Two - Find an officiant or minister to conduct your marriage ceremony at the unit. The chaplain and current ministry volunteers that go into the units are not allowed to perform marriage ceremonies on the units. It is entirely up to the couple to find an officiant. Once you or your spouse find an officiant you must determine their process and fees. The incarcerated spouse will need the officiant’s full name and contact information as well.

Three - Once the outside spouse has a copy of the inmate identification that is acceptable for the county clerk’s office they will use, it is important that they also obtain what is called an Absent Affidavit form from the county clerk’s office they will obtain the marriage license in. This form allows your outside spouse to obtain a marriage license without the inmate being present. The outside spouse obtains this form, mails it directly to the inmate. The inmate fills it out and requests a notary from the law library. Two things happen at this point. One, the inmate should request a notary from the law library by I-60. On this I-60 the inmate should request a notary for marriage purposes and should include the outside spouse’s name as well as the officiant’s name on the request. Two, the inmate should not sign this document until the notary is present or else you will start the process all over again. The notarized form is only valid for a limited number of days, so the inmate must mail it to the outside spouse as quickly as possible. Once they have the inmate id and the absent affidavit form, the outside spouse can obtain the marriage license at the county clerk’s office.

Once you begin these three pre-planning steps you will be on your way to start the approval process with the unit. Of course there are more steps for the outside spouse, but this will help you get started in the right direction. For more information visit http://www.wifeandinmate.com/

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Parole Packet Workshops for 2015

Taylor Chapter
Parole Packet Workshop- Sat 6/13/15
Parole Board Presentation- 6/27/15

Tyler Chapter
Parole Packet Workshop- Sat 9/19/15
Parole Board Presentation- 10/27/15

**For time and locations visit our website at www.tifa.org/events. n

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Don’t Forget! If you order from Amazon use AmazonSmile and select TIFA as your charity.
TIFA Chapters

Amarillo
1st Friday, 7:00 pm
Buchanan Street United Methodist Church
617 N. Buchanan
Amarillo, TX 79107
(806) 433-1843

Austin - South
1st Monday, 6:30 pm
Sunrise Community Church
4430 Manchaca Road
Austin, TX 78745
(512) 371-0900

Austin - North
3rd Tuesday, 6:30 pm
Lord of Life Lutheran Church
9700 Neenah Avenue
Austin, TX 78717
(512) 371-0900

Beaumont
1st Tuesday, 6:30 pm
St. Jude Thaddeus Catholic Church Family Life Center
6825 Gladys
Beaumont, TX 77726
(409) 617-8395

Conroe
Last Monday, 6:30 pm
Eagle’s Nest Ministries
1450 Blake Road
Conroe, TX 77304
(281) 435-9908

Corpus Christi
2nd Tuesday, 7:00 pm
New Life Behavior Ministries
3833 S. Staples, Suite S-103
Corpus Christi, TX 78411
(361) 813-7106

Dallas
3rd Wednesday, 6:30 pm
Lover’s Lane Methodist Church
9200 Inwood Rd Oxford Rm #200
Dallas, TX 75220
(817) 798-9010

Ft. Worth
1st Monday, 6:30 pm
St. Christopher Episcopal Church
3500 S.W. Loop 820
Fort Worth, TX 76133
(817) 798-9010

Granbury
3rd Thursday, 6:30 pm
Century 21 Shirley Hooks Real Estate
122 N. Crockett
Granbury, TX 76048
(817) 219-1628

Humble
2nd Thursday, 7:00 pm
Cavazos Insurance Agency
19333 Hwy 59
Humble, TX 77338
(281) 964-9928

Killeen - Harker Heights
2nd Tuesday, 7:00 pm
Trinity Baptist Church
403 East FM 2410 Rd.
Harker Heights, TX 76548
(254) 289-9429

Pearland - South Houston
3rd Tuesday, 6:30 pm
Manvel Bible Chapel
4230 FM 1128
Pearland, TX 77584
(281) 303-9785

San Antonio - North
3rd Thursday, 7:00 pm
St. Marks Evangelist Catholic Church
1602 Thousand Oaks Dr.
San Antonio, TX
(210) 858-7602

Taylor
Last Saturday, 7:00 pm
Mt. Calvary Baptist Church
602 Symes
Taylor, TX 76574
(512) 352-0006

Tyler
Second Saturday, 10 am
Freedom Fellowship
2915 SSE Loop 323
Tyler, Texas 75701
(903) 504-9771

If you are interested in starting a TIFA chapter in your area, please contact the TIFA office.
(512) 371-0900