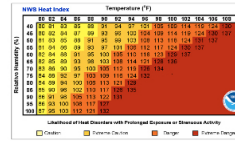


TIFA CONTACT

THE OFFICIAL NEWSLETTER OF TEXAS INMATE FAMILIES ASSOCIATION Vol. 20 No. 3 July 2015



“Reckless Indifference: Extreme Heat in Texas Prisons”



In February 2015, the University of Texas School of Law Human Rights Clinic published the report “Reckless Indifference: Extreme Heat in Texas Prisons”

On July 14 Doug Smith, policy analyst with the Texas Criminal Justice Coalition, convened a group at the Texas State Capitol to discuss the latest report released by the University of Texas School of Law Human Rights Clinic. The report “Reckless Indifference: Extreme Heat in Texas Prisons” revealed the ongoing, dire conditions that inmates and guards alike are exposed to in Texas prisons, which have claimed the lives of at least 14 inmates since 2007. Ariel Dulitzky, head of the Human Rights Clinic and Ted Magee provided a presentation and answered questions from the group.

Jennifer Erschabek represented TIFA and other participants included representatives from the offices of Senators Burton, Whitmire and Rodriquez and the offices of Representatives McClendon, Herrero and Turner. Matt Simpson from the

ACLU also attended.

The report released in Feb. of 2015 expanded on the Clinic’s previous work, “Deadly Heat in Texas Prisons,” by adding inmate testimony as well as inmate grievances, and it established that pleas to the Texas Department of Criminal Justice (TDCJ) have been largely ignored.

The Clinic joins the calls of other international human rights organizations, such as the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights (IACHR), which has stated that with respect to Texas prisons, there is a “need to investigate the deaths of inmates” and to “establish mechanisms to monitor general conditions and address the problems.” The United Nations Committee Against Torture (CAT) has said that it is “particularly concerned” about facilities in Texas and that the state should “adopt urgent measures” to remedy the situation.

The report also uncovers new evidence on the TDCJ grievance procedure. Inmates have described this procedure as frustrating and “pointless,” as the TDCJ fails to carry out prompt and impartial investigations into grievance claims. “No matter how it turns out, there was nothing to substantiate your allegations,” one inmate commented. “Always. That’s just like a rubber stamp.” Other inmates said they are afraid to file complaints, because “you can suffer some very severe repercussions as far as filing complaints about certain things.” As a result, inmates held by TDCJ have been left without a legitimate mechanism to voice their concerns.

The Clinic is urging the TDCJ and the Texas Legislature to implement the

recommendations enumerated in the report before the federal government inevitably intervenes. These include, but are not limited to, establishing temperature limits throughout TDCJ facilities, approving and allocating all necessary funding for the installation of air conditioning, adopting all necessary preventative measures to protect inmate welfare, ensuring that all inmate complaints receive a complete and impartial investigation by an independent investigator and that inmates are protected from retaliation by TDCJ employees for filing such grievances, and establishing proper mechanisms to screen and monitor inmates for heat-related illnesses.

TDCJ takes some precautions to help reduce heat-related illnesses such as providing water and ice to staff and offenders in work and housing areas, restricting offender activity during the hottest parts of the day, and training staff to identify those with heat related illnesses and refer them to medical staff for treatment but the report said these remedies are inadequate or are not being effectively implemented.

In the most recent legal challenge to the stifling conditions in Texas prisons, four prisoners at the Pack Unit filed suit in federal court on June 18, 2014, seeking relief from the oppressive heat that turns metal-lined cell blocks into ovens. The plaintiffs, who suffer from medical conditions or disabilities aggravated by high temperatures, allege they are being subjected to inhumane conditions. See: *Bailey v. Livingston*, U.S.D.C. (S.D. Texas), Case No. 4:14-cv-01698.

“It is a concrete, persistent, well-known danger – summer comes every year, and every year, people

Heat (Continued on page 4)

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Note: We read all mail that is received but cannot answer every letter. Our mission is strengthening families through support, education and advocacy.

Message from the Executive Director, Jennifer Erschabek



Change is in the air....can you feel it? I am so proud and thankful to Sharon Bass for representing TIFA in Washington DC in July at the Ban the Box March and press conference. It was an amazing opportunity for TIFA to be offered a speaking opportunity in front of the White House to talk about how criminal background checks affect our loved ones and families. Raylene Truxton and Pat Profitt attended the TDCJ Quarterly Meeting in Huntsville and I'm staying very busy here in Austin attending meetings at the Capitol and still busy visiting offices at the Capitol.

I'm excited to be having a conference call next week with the Sentencing Project in Washington DC to discuss work time credit and parole reform strategies. TIFA is also working with ACLU on parole reform. And TIFA will be starting a new campaign on the Nation Inside web site, so watch for that. The goal is for all this to come together for the next legislative session.

So if you are a TIFA member, thank you for your support and please plan to renew your membership.....we need you! If you are reading this and are not a member, please consider joining. Change is in the air but we need everyone working together and speaking up. We can do this only with your help. You can join by visiting our website at TIFA.org and while you are there, consider a donation to help us continue the good work. n

Message from TIFA Chair, Patti Kassel



We recently heard my loved one's appeal had been denied once again by the courts. Now at the Federal level, you can imagine we have felt discouraged and defeated more than once. Each and every time, I've been able to rise above the defeat and move forward. There's room for one more opportunity I would convince myself. This time was different. We were now reaching new heights which meant our chances are becoming slimmer with each and every step. The Sunday morning after we had heard the news and needed to make a decision whether to go forward with the yet again next step, I became emotionally distraught. This feeling of defeat had never, throughout the many years of fighting this fight in the courts, ever felt so strong.

I recently read an article on "7 Things to Remember When You Feel Discouraged and Defeated". I thought about many family members or loved ones who might be working through some of their own daily battles like me, and how this might help in some small way. Below is the beginning of this article with 3 of the 7 summarized. I'll review the last 4 in the next newsletter.

3 Things to Remember When You Feel Discouraged and Defeated

Written by Marc Chernoff

1. You are not the center of the universe (stop making it all about YOU).

I think we all have the tendency to

put ourselves at the center of the universe, and see everything from the viewpoint of how it affects us. But this can have all kinds of adverse effects, from feeling sorry for ourselves when things aren't going exactly as planned, to doubting ourselves when we aren't perfect.

So this morning, instead of worrying so much about myself, I thought about other people I might help. Finding little ways to help others gets me out of my self-centered thinking, and then I'm not wallowing in self-pity anymore – I'm starting to think about what others need. I'm not doubting myself, because the question of whether I'm good enough or not is no longer the central question. The central question now is about what others need.

Thus, thinking about others instead of yourself helps solve feelings of discouragement and defeat.

2. It is your resistance to 'what is' that causes your suffering (be present).

This morning my mind was ruminating about every time and place other than the time and place I was in. When I caught myself doing this, I brought my focus back to the present.

Remember, happiness is allowing yourself to be perfectly OK with 'what is,' rather than wishing for and worrying about 'what is not.' 'What is' is what's supposed to be, or it would not be. The rest is just you, arguing with life. Think about that for a minute. This means your suffering only ever occurs when you resist how things are in the present.

Although you can't control everything that happens to you; you can only control the way you respond to what happens. In your response is your power. In your power is your presence.

3. You are more than one thing (loosen up and stretch your identity).

We all have this picture in our minds of ourselves – this idea of what kind of person we are. When this idea gets threatened, we react defensively. People may question whether we did a good job, and this threatens our idea of being a competent person, so we become angry or hurt by the criticism. Someone falsely accuses us of something and this threatens our idea that we're a good person, and so we get angry and attack the other person. My identity of myself as someone who's motivated and productive and has great ideas... this was getting in the way this morning. When I wasn't productive, it made me feel defeated because I began subconsciously worrying that I wasn't who I thought I was.

My solution was to realize that I'm not just one thing. I'm not always productive – sometimes I am, but sometimes I'm unproductive too. I'm not always motivated – sometimes I am, but other times I'm feeling lazy. And obviously I don't always have great ideas either – because that's impossible. The truth is, I can be many things, and remembering this helps me stretch my identity so it isn't so fragile. Then it doesn't matter if someone thinks I didn't do a good job – because I don't always do a good job. I make mistakes. I am less than perfect. And that's perfectly OK.

*(Look for the next 4 Things to Remember When You Are Discouraged in our next newsletter.)*ⁿ



TDCJ Quarterly Meeting - TDCJ's Parole Division

by Raylene Truxton

The TDCJ Quarterly Meeting was held in Huntsville on July 14 and the

topic of discussion was parole release.

TIFA and Texas Cure met with a representative from the TDCJ Parole Division to determine what the policy and procedure was after an offender has been paroled. Both organizations have received numerous grievances about inmates being paroled, but due to unforeseen circumstances, the offender was not released. In one case, an offender has been waiting since July 2014 to be released. He had a place to parole to and that apartment was not rented out to others because the owner expected the offender to parole there. Several members from TIFA became involved with this case and on July 16, 2015, he finally made it home. Another common issue seen is the phone numbers given on an earlier parole plan were not updated and consequently the release process was impaired. Updating the offender's parole plan before seeing the Unit IPO is imperative.

As a result of the Quarterly Meeting, we now understand that the job of the Unit IPO is to provide accurate release information to the Parole Division. The Parole Division then assumes the responsibility to determine if the information is accurate. The Parole Division also closely monitors inmates who are paroling to halfway houses and gives priority to those offenders who are nearest to their mandatory release date. They do not track all those who are waiting for release to private homes.

Rissie Owens joined the meeting for a few minutes and explained how the Unit IPOs were moved under the Parole Board to provide better communication between the Board and TDCJ. ⁿ



Announcing: PACT Conference 2015 Saturday Oct. 3

TDCJ will be hosting a free informational conference for offenders' families and members of the general public on **Saturday, October 3, 2015**. The Public Awareness — Corrections Today (PACT) conference will be held at the **Sam Houston State University Criminal Justice Center in Huntsville, Texas** and will be coordinated by the TDCJ Ombudsman Program.

Registration will begin at 8:00 AM the day of the conference. The conference will consist of presentations from several TDCJ Divisions, beginning at 9:00 AM. Throughout the day, agency staff will be available to interact with participants. Resource tables will be open from 8:30 AM to 4 PM, with brochures and other helpful information available.

Additional conference information for participants will be available on the TDCJ website, www.tdcj.texas.gov and in unit visitation areas. Please share this information with family members and friends who might be interested in finding out more about the agency.

TIFA will have a resource room and a general membership meeting during the lunch break. Check our website at TIFA.org for more information. **n**

Representatives from Classification and Records Visit San Antonio Chapter

by Rita Castro

In July, the south San Antonio TIFA Chapter was honored to have TDCJ Classification and Records Assistant

Director Joni White and Classifications Operations Manager Debra Gibbs as our guest speakers. Ms White and Ms Gibbs provided information and answered questions asked by the many TIFA members who filled the room.

The Classification and Records Department is responsible for classifying and maintaining the records of all those in the custody of TDCJ. Classifications schedules, receives, processes, and coordinates transport of offenders for intake, release and transfer, as well as handle requests for hardship transfers.

The TDCJ intake process includes preparing to receive transfers from county jails. The number of transfers they can receive depends on the number of beds available throughout the state. They coordinate with the Transportation Department to receive incoming people at the 24 intake units located around the state. They ensure that a person's Pin Packet is prepared and ready for the transfer. They have set daily processes and procedures and review religious and disability status.

During intake, a demographic sheet is filled out including the person's name, date of birth, and county. If they had a previous TDCJ number, and the maximum date on that sentence has passed, a new TDCJ number is issued. Emergency contact information is gathered, their photograph is taken, fingerprints, and any tattoos are noted. Assessments are conducted on health, IQ and education, substance abuse, risk, and family history. A unit assignment is made based on their age, offense, record, medical, vocational/educational goals, and work assignment.

Classifications reviews custody levels, housing and treatment needs at least once a year. They also look at disciplinary records. Each unit has a UCC or Unit Classification Committee made up of a chairperson, a member

of the treatment team, a representative from security, and may include a representative from medical and/or the STG (security threat group) team. The division processes about 16,000 requests a week. **n**

Heat (Continued from page 1)

die," said Brian McGiverin, an attorney with the Texas Civil Rights Project (TCRP), which represents the prisoners.

In December of 2013, a federal district judge in Baton Rouge ruled that extreme heat in Louisiana's Angola prison—where death row inmates are housed—was tantamount to a violation of the Eighth Amendment's prohibition of cruel and unusual punishment, and that the heat index must be kept at or below 88 degrees.

In July 2015, a three-judge panel of the 5th U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals in New Orleans said they agreed with Chief U.S. District Judge Brian Jackson, of Baton Rouge, that Louisiana is in violation of the three prisoners' Eighth Amendment protection against cruel and unusual punishment. The panel also said Jackson did not abuse his discretion in issuing an injunction against the state. However, the panel stated, air conditioning is "unnecessary to correct the Eighth Amendment violation." The three inmates are entitled to a remedy that reduces the risk of harm to a "socially acceptable level," the panel said, adding that some risk is "permissible and perhaps unavoidable."

Under the Prison Litigation Reform Act, the plaintiffs are not entitled to the most effective available remedy; they are entitled to a remedy that eliminates the constitutional injury. The panel also felt the district court erred because it awarded relief facility-wide, instead of limiting relief to only the plaintiffs Ball, Code, and Magee.

TIFA will continue to monitor the proceedings and be a voice and representative for our loved ones inside. **n**

Summary of Selected Legislation Passed by the 84th Legislature

TIFA did some very good work this last session working with other groups such as the Texas Criminal Justice Coalition, Grassroots Leadership and others to bring attention to things that needed change in the Texas criminal justice system. Of course, there was both good and bad this session and there is always next session.

Below is an excerpt from The Houston Chronicle editorial board that partially sums up the session:

"Like practically every other issue confronted by the Legislature, criminal justice reformers ended up with a mixed bag of moderate accomplishments, watered-down deals and failed bills. They even drew a veto from Gov. Greg Abbott, who struck down a Good Samaritan bill that would have protected people from prosecution if they call 911 to report a drug overdose. Apparently saving lives isn't as important as being tough at any cost. And that's a cost that adds up. So while U.S. Sen. John Cornyn is working at the federal level to pass legislation that would allow low-risk prisoners to spend more time in home confinement instead of in prison, state legislators have kicked that can down the road.

Despite pre-session hype, legislators failed to pass legislation that would lower penalties for nonviolent offenders, notably state Rep. Joe Moody's bill to decriminalize marijuana. No wonder the Department of Criminal Justice general revenue budget grew by nearly half a billion dollars for the next biennium. All that money does little to actually reform prisoners and help them become productive members of society. Legislators even ignored some of the lowest-hanging fruit among criminal justice fixes: Treat 17-year-olds as juveniles rather than adults. Intensive juvenile detention and probation programs can put kids back on the right track, and federal law compels Texas to change this standard. But apparently, legislators are content plucking teenagers out of society just as they approach adulthood and surrounding them with hardened criminals.

Texas doesn't make it easy when people leave prison, either. A bill to "ban the box," which would prevent state agencies from asking about one's criminal history on job applications, passed the state House but not the Senate. Supported by the Center for American Progress, a progressive think tank, and the conservative Koch Brothers, this initiative is supposed to help convicted felons get their foot in the door for job interviews before having to reveal their records. As Houston Police Chief Charles McClelland said in a radio interview last year, there's "a lot of young men who are minorities, in their early 20s, have a felony conviction on their résumé, and now they're unemployed."

Below are summaries of selected legislation passed by the 84th Legislature. It is only a partial list.

HB 10 by Thompson – makes multiple changes related to the criminal and civil consequences of trafficking of persons and compelling prostitution and other related offenses and requires the Office of the Governor to establish the Child Sex Trafficking Prevention Unit within the Criminal Justice Division. (Effective 9/1/15)

HB 48 by McClendon – creates the Timothy Cole Exoneration Review Commission to examine all cases in this state in which an innocent defendant was convicted and then, on or after January 1, 2010, was exonerated, and include all findings and make recommendations to the Legislature to prevent future wrongful convictions. (Effective immediately)

HB 189 by Thompson – extends the statute of limitations for which a person may bring a civil suit for personal injury suffered during certain sex crimes. (Effective 9/1/15)

HB 372 by Riddle – requires as a condition of community supervision prohibiting certain defendants who must register as a sex offender and who have a numeric risk level of two or three from being able to access the internet for certain purposes. The bill also requires the defendant to submit to regular inspection or monitoring of each electronic device used by the defendant to access the internet to insure compliance. (Effective 9/1/15)

HB 549 by Johnson - Requires the Commission on Jail Standards (CJS) to establish minimum standards for prisoner visitation for county jail prisoners. Counties that have incurred significant costs prior to 9/1/15 for providing visitation that does not comply with the new rule are not affected by the new rule. Also prohibits a CJS rule that would restrict a county jail from limiting prisoner visitation for disciplinary reasons. (Effective 9/1/15)

HB 583 by Larson – allows a judge to order a defendant, in lieu of performing a specified number of community work hours, to make a donation to a charitable organization engaged primarily in performing functions for veterans. In a county with a population less than 50,000, the donation may be made to another nonprofit organization engaged in providing services or assistance to needy individuals or families in the community (Effective 9/1/15)

HB 634 by Metcalf – requires TDCJ and the Commission on Jail Standards to establish reasonable rules, procedures and policies regarding visitation of an offender by a court appointed guardian at a TDCJ correctional institution or a county jail. (Effective 9/1/15)

HB 710 by Turner, Sylvester – permits the Parole Division to issue a summons, rather than a pre-revocation warrant, for certain parolees who commit a new criminal offense if the offense is not greater than a Class B misdemeanor and is not against a child or a family violence offense. The parolee must have maintained stable employment and residence for at least one year; not been previously charged with an offense since being released; and not be a registered sex offender, on SISF, an absconder or a threat to public safety. (Effective 9/1/15)

HB 875 by Farias - requires TDCJ, during the intake process, to record an inmate's military history on intake documents and verify an inmate's veteran status. This information is also to be used to help veterans apply for federal benefits or compensation for which the inmate may be eligible. The bill also adds a similar requirement for county jail facilities. (Effective 9/1/15)

HB 904 by Smith - requires all defendants convicted of a felony and sentenced to death, life or who are ineligible for release on bail pending appeal, and who give notice of appeal, to be transferred to TDCJ. (Effective 9/1/15)

HB 941 by Hernandez – requires creation of a DNA record upon conviction of certain offenses to include enticing a child and no longer requires DNA samples from those placed on deferred adjudication for public lewdness or indecent exposure. (Effective 9/1/15)

HB 943 by Thompson - requires judges to view incarceration as a financial hardship before establishing child support orders. This will lead to quicker restoration of regular child support payments as formerly incarcerated parents begin new lives. (Effective 9/1/15)

HB 1083 by Marquez – requires an appropriate medical or mental health professional to perform a mental health assessment on an inmate prior to placement in administrative segregation. (Effective 9/1/15)

HB 1140 by Israel – relates to the ability of the Commission on Jail Standards to evaluate adequate health care for pregnant prisoners in county jails throughout Texas. (Effective 9/1/15)

Legislation (Continued on page 6)

Legislation (Continued from page 5)

HB 1396 by Workman - codified the rule of lenity, which holds that if there are two reasonable meanings of a criminal statute, then a judge must interpret it in favor of the defendant. It updates property offense "thresholds," and the dollar ranges corresponding to set penalties so that penalties are more proportionate to the crime committed. The bill also prohibits a peace officer from searching someone's cell phone without a warrant. (Effective 9/1/15)

HB 1510 by Thompson - eliminates the risk of lawsuits when landlords, leasing agents, and property managers lease property to people with criminal records.

HB 1546 by Allen – currently, following receipt of a report from TDCJ detailing participation, a judge may give **state jail offenders** credit (up to 20 percent of their sentence) for diligent participation in an industrial, work, agricultural, educational or vocational program. The bill permits judges to remove themselves from the process and have TDCJ apply the credit and this expedites an early release for those serving state jail sentences. However, if the offender commits a disciplinary infraction, the report must be sent to the judge for a decision. (Effective 9/1/15)

HB 1595 by Murr – requires defendants or confined persons to be tested for communicable diseases if a peace officer, magistrate or correctional employee comes into contact with the person's bodily fluids during a judicial proceeding or while the defendant is confined after conviction or adjudication resulting from arrest. (Effective immediately)

HB 1908 by Naishtat – requires certain mentally impaired offenders to be identified and qualified for the continuity of care system. (Effective 9/1/15)

HB 1914 by Bonnen, D. – allows a parole panel to "set off" another parole consideration for up to 10 years if the offender is serving time for aggravated sexual assault or a life sentence on a capital felony. (Effective 9/1/15)

HB 2159 by Moody – revises the method for payment of restitution as a condition of community supervision for offenses involving family violence committed in the presence of children under the age of 15. The bill requires the court to order restitution for the payment of medical, psychiatric and psychological care for the child witness, and to specify the manner of payment. (Effective 9/1/15)

HB 2189 by Parker – requires TDCJ to establish a safe living environment with specialized programs and treatment for developmentally disabled incarcerated offenders. (Effective 9/1/15)

HB 2398 by White – decriminalizes truancy by repealing the prior Class C misdemeanor and instead creating a new civil offense. (Effective 9/1/15)

HB 3387 by Krause – requires a parole panel to mandate as a condition of parole or mandatory supervision that a releasee participate in a sex offender treatment program if the releasee was serving a sentence for a sex offense under Chapter 21, of the Penal Code or is required to register as a sex offender under Chapter 62 of the Code of Criminal Procedure and constitutes a threat to society. (Effective 9/1/15)

SB 200 by Nelson et al - includes a provision to provide essential food assistance to people as they are released from prison, and connects them with employment and training programs to help them get back on their feet. (Effective 9/1/15)

SB 578 by Hinojosa – requires TDCJ to identify organizations that

provide reentry and integration resource guides and to collaborate with those organizations to make a resource guide available to all inmates. The resource guide must be made available in WSD libraries, peer educator classrooms, chapels, reintegration specialist offices, and any other area used by TDCJ to provide reentry information. TDCJ must also compile similar packets that are county - specific. (Effective 9/1/15)

SB 746 by Whitmire – changes the name of the Office of Violent Sex Offender Management to the Texas Civil Commitment Office (TCCO) and requires TCCO to develop a tiered supervision and treatment program for civilly committed persons that provides a seamless transition from total confinement to less restrictive housing and eventual release from civil commitment. (Effective immediately)

SB 790 by Kolkhorst – allows a magistrate to release on bond certain offenders held on a pre-revocation warrant if both the Parole Division and the magistrate determine that the person is not a threat to public safety. Bail and bail forfeiture provisions apply, except that the release under this bill is conditioned upon the person's appearance at a hearing. (Effective 9/1/15)

SB 1024 by Seliger – allows Windham School District to award diplomas to students who meet the requirements. It also allows students to get credit towards graduation for courses completed in the Windham School District educational programs. (Effective immediately)

SB 1630 by Whitmire – limits commitment to the Texas Juvenile Justice Department (TJJD) to those youth who receive determinate sentences, unless the court finds that the youth has behavioral health or other special needs that cannot be addressed within the youth's home community. (Effective 9/1/15)

SB 1697 by Huffman – adds an exception to the Public Information Act that makes confidential the identifying information of any person who participates in the execution procedure, including a person who uses, supplies or administers a substance during an execution. The bill also makes confidential the identifying information of any person or entity that manufactures, compounds, prescribes, dispenses, or provides a substance or supplies used in an execution. (Effective 9/1/15)

SB 1902 by Perry - allows individuals who have been convicted of a low-level misdemeanor to petition the court to seal the record from the public, employers (except in sensitive fields such as education, health care, etc.) and landlords. (Effective 9/1/15)

Selected Vetoes by the Governor

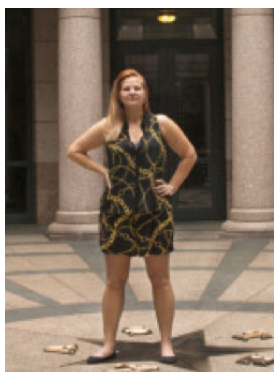
HB 225 by Guillen - would create a defense to prosecution for certain drug offenses for individuals seeking medical assistance for themselves and others and would allow the use of opioid antagonists in certain situations. (Vetoed by the Governor)

HB 1015 by Canales - relates to notice provided to a court by TDCJ when certain defendants serving on state jail felonies are eligible for community supervision. (Vetoed by the Governor)

HB 1855 by Rose - relates to training, continuing education, and weapons proficiency standards for correctional officers employed by the Texas Department of Criminal Justice. (Vetoed by the Governor)

HB 3579 by Alonzo - provided an incentive for state jail felony offenders, such as those convicted of possessing less than 1 gram of drugs, to accept probation and abide by all supervision conditions. Upon doing so, they could, with the consent of the prosecutor and judge, have their offense reclassified as a Class A misdemeanor. (Vetoed by the Governor) [n](#)

From the Outside In



By Lauren Johnson,
Grassroots Leadership

Since you have a loved one on the outside that is involved in TIFA, you

are already ahead of the curve, you not only have support that is more involved than most, but you are also somewhat aware of the fact that there are folks out here fighting for you every day. I didn't know that when I was locked up. I didn't realize that there were people out here working hard to make changes that would impact my future, much less did I realize that I would eventually become one of those people. I didn't know that I had a voice, and didn't know that it was powerful enough to do anything with.

I wanted to take a moment to write something to you, to encourage you, because we are connected. Even though we may never meet in person, we are connected. The things that I do, can impact you, just as the things you do can impact me. We just have to decide how we want to impact the world around us. I want to encourage each of you to spend each day living in such a way that if they shut down most of the prisons a year, a month, or a day from now, and let the people who had made the best use of their time be the first in line to go, you would be among the first released. The reality is some of you may be coming home that soon. Some of you may have a sentence that is larger than that but I still want to encourage you to not think about how much or little time you have, but what you are doing with it. Too often people plan on

making up for lost time. The problem is, we can't make up for lost time, or we just lose more time. Right now, this is where you are. Make the most of everyday!

I have a pen pal in Washington and not too long ago they passed a law that gave people who were sentenced as youthful offenders a chance at getting out, (Washington currently does not have a parole system) the problem for some of them is that they waited until that happened to start behaving in a way that would warrant getting out. That was too late.

From where I am sitting, I can see the tides beginning to turn, America is beginning to wake up to the idea that incarceration doesn't solve all of our problems, and in fact has created a whole new wave of them. And, while changes in policy on the state and national level aren't the fastest to happen, they can, and are happening. I see headlines every day across the nation where radical changes are happening. I want you to be ready when we win your battle. There are some amazing and tireless advocates out here working hard to win the war, and I want you to be ready when we do!

I realize that it isn't always easy to get into classes and programs there, but there are ways to achieve things while you are there. The REAL Act has been introduced in Congress which if passed would allow people who are incarcerated to receive Pell grants for college. Until then, there are colleges that do correspondence classes and accept payment arrangements.

A few places that you can write to request more information about the correspondence courses that they offer are:

Adams State Univ. Extended Studies
208 Edgemont Blvd Ste. 3000
Alamosa Co, 81101

Stratford Career Institute Admissions
Department
PO BOX 1919
Champlain, New York 12919-9854

You can request a course catalog and more information about the programs available through correspondence.

You can also have someone send you the **Prisoners' Guerrilla Handbook to Correspondence Programs** for more information than we can include here. [n](#)



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Anniversary tee-shirt
celebrating
20 years!!
Visit our website at
tifa.org for
sizes, availability and
ordering information.

Wear it to the
Pact Conference and
show our solidarity!

The Last Parole
Packet Workshop
for 2015

Tyler Chapter

Parole Packet Workshop- Sat 9/19/15
Parole Board Presentation- In Oct.

**For time and location visit our website at
www.tifa.org/events. [n](#)



Texas Inmate Families Association

Strengthening families through support, education, and advocacy

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(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, 7:00 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) 219-1628

Ft. Worth

1st Monday, 6:30 pm
St. Christopher Episcopal Church
3550 S.W. Loop 820
Fort Worth, TX 76133
(817) 798-9010

Granbury

Currently Reorganizing
Century 21 Shirley Hooks Real Estate
122 N. Crockett
Granbury, TX 76048

Houston

2nd Tuesday, 7:00 pm
C.O.O.L. Ministries
5005 W. 34th Street Suite 103-C
Houston, TX 77092
(713) 450-3972

Humble

2nd Thursday, 7:00 pm
Cavazos Insurance Agency
19333 Hwy 59
Humble, TX 77338
(281) 217-0768

Killeen - Harker Heights

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

Nacogdoches

Organizing meeting Aug 15 10-12:00
(Check the TIFA website for permanent
meeting day & time)
First Baptist Church
411 North Street
Nacogdoches, TX 75961
(936) 564-4546

Pearland - South Houston

3rd Tuesday, 6:30 pm
Manvel Bible Chapel
4230 FM 1128
Pearland, TX 77584
(713) 303-9785

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

San Antonio

2nd Tuesday, 7:00 pm
St. Vincent De Paul Catholic
Church Parish Hall
4222 Southwest Loop 410
San Antonio, TX
(210) 387-1558

San Antonio - North

3rd Thursday, 7:00 pm
St Marks Evangelist
Catholic Church
1602 Thousand Oaks Dr.
San Antonio, TX
(915) 204-5870

Taylor

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

Tyler

2nd Saturday, 10 am
Freedom Fellowship
2915 SSE Loop 323
Tyler, Texas 75701
(903) 504-9771