



**TEXAS INMATE FAMILIES
ASSOCIATION - TIFA**

**Jennifer Erschabek
Executive Director
March 23, 2016**


TIFA'S MISSION:

- o TIFA is a non-profit organization whose mission is to "break the cycle of crime by strengthening families through support, education, and advocacy".
- o We work to:
 - Support and strengthen existing family relationships
 - Remove the stigma associated with family members of offenders
 - Inform state officials and the general public about the effects of the criminal justice system upon the offenders' families

**FAMILY HARDSHIPS DUE TO
INCARCERATION**

- o Added stress of knowing that a family member has lost their freedom and lives in an hostile & dangerous environment
- o Some family members are unsupportive about maintaining family ties with the incarcerated
- o Stigma hinders relationships and support networks for family members
- o Financial instability and material hardship

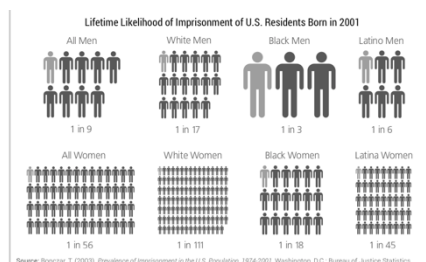


FAMILY HARDSHIPS DUE TO INCARCERATION (CONT)

- Children having school behavior issues and performance problems
- Stress of incarceration on premarital and marital relationships
- Lack of organizations like TIFA who offer valuable information about the incarceration process



UNDERSTANDING THE CRISES IN OUR FAMILIES & COMMUNITIES: RACE & GENDER



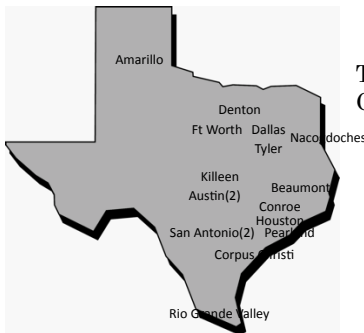
TIFA'S GOALS

- Be a support network to families with incarcerated loved ones
- Work with TDCJ to improve visitation, family contact and strengthen family bonds
- Improve communications between offenders and their families
- Help families improve services to and overall well-being of offenders while incarcerated
- Aid in the difficult transition of offenders back into society after release, (linking with agencies for jobs, housing, social programs)
- Advocate to the legislature and the community to increase better understanding of the family's circumstances due to an incarceration



HOW TIFA ACCOMPLISHES ITS MISSION AND GOALS





TIFA CHAPTERS

TIFA CHAPTER MEETINGS

- Offer open, supportive discussions
- Meet other families with similar struggles
- Feature speakers of interest
 - TDCJ Regional Directors
 - Education – Windham and Colleges
 - Commissary
 - Parole Board Members
 - Support groups such as KAIROS
- Meet with other advocacy groups

OUTREACH

- Website – TIFA.org
 - Events calendar and chapter information
 - Parole Workshops
 - Newsletters, legislative updates, documents and links of interest
- Quarterly Newsletter – TIFA Contact
- Emails- Constant Contact
- Facebook (General Support page
 - Members Only Information page)



ADVOCACY WITH TDCJ

- Meet quarterly with TDCJ in Huntsville
- Subject matter is decided upon in advance
- TDCJ representatives from different divisions are in attendance
- Types of issues that are addressed include:
 - Visitation
 - Medical care
 - Parole
 - Commissary
 - Reentry
 - Grievance/Case issues
 - Food
 - Emergency absences
 - Education
 - Prison safety and environment

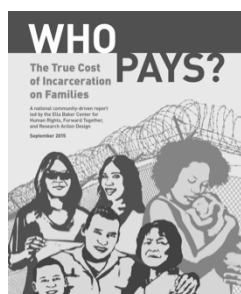
PAROLE PACKET WORKSHOPS

- Parole process is explained
- Opportunities for members to ask questions and get examples for packets
- Four workshops a year are given around the state
- Board of Pardons and Parole attends chapter meetings to do a follow-up Q & A session
- Work with the Darrington Seminary to provide parole workshops inside TDCJ

WORKING ON ISSUES AND CHALLENGES



FINANCIAL IMPACT OF INCARCERATION



<http://ellabakercenter.org/sites/default/files/downloads/who-pays.pdf>

FINANCIAL IMPACT OF INCARCERATION

- Expenses supported by families: trust fund, books & magazines, phone calls, emails, care packages, tuition

- Monthly – About \$470

- Yearly – About \$5,640

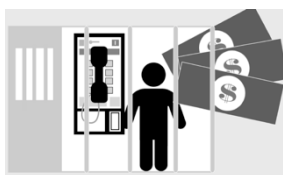
WHAT FAMILIES PAID IN 2013 INTO TRUST FUND ACCOUNTS

- o \$115-\$120 million in trust fund accounts
- o \$101 million in revenue generated through commissary purchases
 - \$91 million covers operating costs
 - o \$72 million used to purchase products for commissary
 - o \$17 million goes to salaries (~410 positions)
 - \$4.5 million transferred through a MOU to Windham for offender education and entertainment
 - \$5.5 million goes back to general revenue



WHAT FAMILIES ARE PAYING FOR PHONE CALLS

- o In 2014 \$36.8 million was paid to the OTS
- o State law allows Texas a commission rate of 40% which in 2014 resulted in \$14.5 million
- o The first \$10 million goes to the Victims of Crimes fund
- o The remaining \$4.5 million was split between Victims of Crimes fund and the State General Revenue fund



FINANCIAL IMPACT OF INCARCERATION

- o Estimates on monthly phone calls
 - How many accept phone calls – 79%
 - How much is spent
 - o \$0-\$100 – 60%
 - o \$101 - \$200 – 27%
 - o \$201-\$450 – 13%

VISITATION

Issues include:

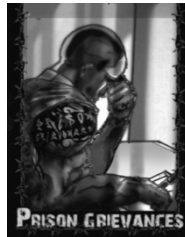
- o Distance traveled
- o Wait/space available at unit for visitation
- o Guard interpretation of visitation rules
- o Expense
- o Difficulty of visitation with/for small children
- o Noise



DISCIPLINE & GRIEVANCES


Issues include:

- o False accusations
- o Fairness & trust in the process
- o Penalties & impact of cases on rehabilitation
- o Lack of independent oversight



TEXAS FAMILIES FOR JUSTICE RALLY






TEXAS FAMILIES FOR JUSTICE

TEXAS FAMILIES FOR JUSTICE

We rallied so Texas lawmakers would consider:

- o creating restorative, re-integrative, and community-based solutions instead of punishment for the masses
- o creating economic and social solutions to jobs, housing, food, healthcare, education and racial justice
- o making higher education available to all, in and out of prison; stopping the school to prison pipeline
- o eliminating for-profit prisons
- o reforming parole by approving applicants based on a fair evaluation



TEXAS FAMILIES FOR JUSTICE


TEXAS FAMILIES FOR JUSTICE

We rallied so Texas lawmakers would consider:

- o releasing low risk incarcerated elders
- o banning post-prison discrimination in education, jobs and housing
- o overhauling the public defense system statewide
- o raising the age of adult criminal responsibility to 18
- o paying correctional officers a fair wage and providing additional training
- o limiting administrative segregation
- o investing in community-based and public health solutions to drug addiction and mental illness

**BILLS SUPPORTED BY TIFA DURING THE
84TH LEGISLATIVE SESSION**

- o **HB 1546** Thompson -Relating to the award of diligent participation credit to defendants confined in a state jail felony facility.
- o **HB 3303** Miles -Relating to the creation of the Office of the Independent Oversight Ombudsman for the Texas Department of Criminal Justice.
- o **HB 1267** Thompson -Relating to the eligibility of certain persons for the supplemental nutrition assistance program.



**BILLS SUPPORTED BY TIFA DURING THE
84TH LEGISLATIVE SESSION**

- o ~~HB 548 Johnson - Relating to the consideration of criminal history record information regarding applicants for state employment.~~ (Ban the Box)
- o **HB 549 Johnson** -Relating to certain duties of the Commission on Jail Standards regarding visitation periods for county jail prisoners. (Video Visitation)

84TH LEGISLATIVE SESSION – HB 1

General Revenue Funds for TDCJ were increased by \$458.4 million for the 2016–17 biennium and this includes:

- o \$10.0 million for the purchase of comprehensive video surveillance systems
- o \$60.0 million for the agency's major repair and renovation efforts to maintain our existing physical plant totaling over 100 correctional facilities statewide.
- o 8% salary increase (\$188.0 million) for correctional officers, correctional laundry and food service managers, ranking correctional officers, and parole officers
- o \$139.4 million increase for Correctional Managed Health Care



VIDEO VISITATION

H.B. 549 works to encourage inmate access to in-person visitations.

- o The number of county jails using video visitation is increasing.
- o The cost of video visitation can be a significant obstacle for low- income families.
- o Eliminating in-person visitation has led to an increase of inmate-on-staff assaults.



BAN THE BOX




ENSURING PEOPLE WITH CONVICTIONS HAVE A FAIR CHANCE TO WORK



BAN THE BOX



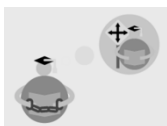
Has a state law (may also have city and county fair chance policies)
Has at least one city or county fair chance policy



BAN THE BOX/FAIR CHANCE

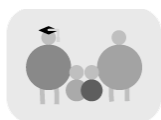
Delaying criminal history checks:

- o Is Good for Families.
- o Helps the Economy and is Good for Business.
- o Improves Public Safety.
- o Improves the Willingness of Employers to Hire the Applicant.
- o Retains the Employer's Discretion to Hire the Most Qualified Candidate.



PELL GRANTS TO HELP PAY FOR COLLEGE

On May 21, a bill was introduced to Congress that would allow state and federal prisoners to receive Pell Grants for a college education, even while incarcerated. The Restoring Education and Learning (REAL) Act would revoke Congress's 1994 ban on providing Pell Grants to federal and state prisoners.



FOR FAMILIES

In-prison college education:

- Improves parenting behaviors
- Higher family income
- Increases likelihood that children and family members achieve higher education levels
- Reduces likelihood of children experiencing behavioral problems.

THE UPCOMING 85TH LEGISLATIVE SESSION

- Independent Oversight for TDCJ
- Fair Sentencing Reviews for Long-term Prisoners
- Due Diligence Credit Toward Parole Review
- Modification of Prison Sentences for Age, Health or Other Compelling Reasons
- For Reentry: Fair Chance Hiring and Housing
- Raise the Age: For those entering the adult prison system from 17 to 18 years of age

**WE NEED YOUR HELP TO
HELP TEXAS FAMILIES**

- We need your support to ensure strong, healthy, families in Texas
- Help us educate the general public about the issues associated with incarceration and its negative affects on the families and children of those incarcerated
- Support TIFA financially by using Amazon Smile, Kroger, Randall's and selecting TIFA as your charity or making a donation on our website at TIFA.org
- YOU CAN MAKE A DIFFERENCE

THANK YOU!
