

TIFA CONTACT

THE OFFICIAL NEWSLETTER OF TEXAS INMATE FAMILIES ASSOCIATION Vol. 22 No. 4 Oct



Second Look Summit Nov 17-18, 2017

Every year in Texas more than 20,000 youth are arrested and charged as adults. Currently 6,500 people are in Texas state prisons for crimes they committed before they could legally vote.

In Texas, youth are routinely sent to Texas adult prisons either because they are (1) 17 years old at the time of the commitment offense and therefore adults under Texas law, (2) certified to stand trial as adults or (3) completing their determinate sentences after aging out of the juvenile justice system.

Research has shown that certain areas of the brain, particularly those that affect judgment and decision-making, do not fully develop until the early 20's. The US Supreme Court stated in its 2005 Roper v. Simmons decision, "the reality that juveniles still struggle to define their identity means it is less supportable to conclude that even a heinous crime committed by a juvenile is evidence of irretrievably depraved character."

We are therefore working to give those who have committed crimes in their youth a Second Look. We are asking Texas legislators to lower the mandatory minimum term before parole eligibility, and require the Parole Board to consider mitigating factors as part of their assessment during a parole review. Texas law should motivate young people to focus on rehabilitation and provide a path to redemption for those who can prove they deserve a second chance.

On November 17-18, 2017, the Lone Star

Justice Alliance and its partners, the Texas Inmate Families Association, Texas Criminal Justice Coalition, American Civil Liberties Union, Epicenter, the Campaign for Youth Justice, Grassroots Leadership, and the Campaign for Fair Sentencing of Youth will host the first annual Second Look Summit. This Summit brings together families of those currently and formerly incarcerated, formerly incarcerated youth, survivors of crime, and community stakeholders to discuss the incarceration of youth in Texas prisons.

The meeting will take place at the Legislative Conference Center located at 1100 Congress Avenue - E2.002 Austin, TX 78701.

The Lone Star Justice Alliance and its amazing partners have also joined together to provide scholarships for travel to the Second Look Summit. If you are interested in attending the Summit, but travel costs are a barrier, please apply for a scholarship. You can visit the LSJA website to register & apply for a scholarship at <http://www.lonestarjusticealliance.org/secondlook2017.html> n

Heat, Hurricane and TDCJ

In August, after a scathing rebuke from U.S. District Judge Ellison, 1,000 medically sensitive inmates from the Pack Unit were moved to other state jails and prisons that do have air conditioning. Texas moved about 500 inmates to the Diboll Correctional Center and about 425 to the Travis State Jail in Austin. Some prisoners who needed more medical attention were transferred to a medical unit in Beaumont. All of these units are already air-conditioned in the housing areas.

Then on August 26th, Hurricane Harvey battered the Gulf Coast and the storm dumped an unprecedented amount of rain on East Texas. With the Brazos River rising rapidly, TDCJ was faced with the difficult task of evacuating three facilities - Terrell, Ramsey and Stringfellow - that

were threatened by flood waters. This involved moving approximately 4,500 offenders to higher ground. Later, two additional prisons were evacuated because of the Brazos, the Vance and Jester 3 Units in Richmond affecting approximately another 1,400 inmates assigned to those two facilities. Eventually over 6,000 inmates were evacuated and relocated to prisons throughout East Texas.

The Beaumont area was also significantly impacted by flood waters associated with the hurricane but it was decided that the Stiles, Gist, and LeBlanc units would shelter in place. During the storm, there were power outages and the city's water system was damaged resulting in low water pressure. TDCJ brought in additional staff and resources including generators and water while the city worked to restore power and repair their water system.

In the middle of September, TDCJ began the process of repopulating the evacuated units but Judge Ellison ruled that 600 inmates evacuated during Hurricane Harvey from the Stringfellow unit to the largely-vacant Wallace Pack Unit must be immediately protected from dangerous indoor heat at the facility. They are now part of a protected class that sued the Pack facility.

On Oct 12, Judge Ellison ordered a 90-day extension of his order to provide air conditioned housing for heat-sensitive inmates at the Pack Unit. The order would have expired in October allowing inmates to be moved back to the unit.

Weather has certainly presented a challenge to TDCJ this summer. n



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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.



**From Board
Chair
Patti
Kassel**

Heart for Humanity



These past few months have been difficult at best for many of our loved ones in the path of Hurricane Harvey. The storm caused over 6,000 inmates to be displaced through other units due to flooding conditions. Many people in the free world didn't even know or many didn't care that this natural disaster had impacted so many inmates, guards and TDCJ units.

The first response of many Texans and US citizens was to reach out to help our citizens. The outpouring by state and national relief groups was huge. We were proud to be Texans helping Texans in the wake of such a tragedy.

After the storm calmed, the news hit how much support had been given. Not only by our citizens walking the streets in Texas, but also by our incarcerated citizens of Texas. Yes, I was in tears when I read the amount of giving by our loved ones. Here's the quote from Houston (AP). "Officials say Texas prison inmates donated more than \$53,000 from their commissary funds to the American Red Cross to be used for hurricane relief. More than 6,600 inmates donated money between August 31 and September 30." WOW!

And this wasn't the first time, our loved ones came to the aid after a natural disaster. In 2005 after Katrina, inmates donated more than \$40,000 to the American Red Cross. This is the love for humanity at its finest.

Thank you, thank you to all our incarcerated loved ones that donated and to all that wished they could. It's not always the action, because many don't have the means, but it is about the love for our fellow man and thought that goes behind it. This action represented all inmates and showed us that we can have an impact on the world around us no matter our circumstances. n

**From Executive
Director
Jennifer
Erschabek**



The Changing Landscapes

The Texas political scene was 'rocked' in October with the announcement that Joe Straus, Speaker of the House, will not be running for re-election. What this tells us is that the political landscape, both on the state and national level, will look different in 2019 when once again TIFA will be working on criminal justice issues.

What can we do in the mean time? What we can do is EDUCATE ourselves about the upcoming elections AND tell our stories. Our communities need to understand that public safety is a must but it cannot be to the detriment of our communities' and families' futures. So we need to tell our stories. Join us as we start our new campaign to gather stories and share through media and social media. If you are asking what you can do to help.... do this!

Another landscape that is changing is our relationship with TDCJ. With the new leadership in place, Mr. Collier and Mr. Mendoza, we are slowly starting to see a crack that is allowing light to come through. Through the hurricane and the hiring freeze there was an effort to share more information with families than ever before.

The hiring freeze has resulted in Windham positions not being hired, resulting in classes not being available. But with the hiring of a new Division Director, Rene Hinojosa, we expect new opportunities from the Rehabilitation Programs Division.

But we also promise to continue to work on the grievance system and the treatment of our loved ones while they are in TDCJ.

Our voice is being heard and every day we are gaining new partners, not only in the fight for criminal justice change but also for the treatment of our loved ones while they are in the TDCJ. We hear you and we are here for you! You are not alone! n



The Joy of Reading, then Writing

By Terri LeClerc, Ph.D.

Families who support their Loved Ones will continue to encourage education, and that means reading. Reading any and everything, including those rejected grievances. There's always something to learn.

When I review rejected grievances, I can divide them fairly easily into two groups: those that the grievance officer has just skimmed and stamped, and those that were so poorly written or off-topic that no grievance officer could have accepted as valid. We can't do too much about the auto-stamps. Let's look at the writers who inadvertently shoot themselves in the foot, and think through how reading—any sort of reading—will help your grievance-writers get on the right track.

First, the issue has to be grievable.

Unfortunately for so many, if the writer just wants to air anger about an officer who sneers, or turns her back as she walks down a hallway, well.. that's not on the list on Constitutional privileges or TDC policy officer requirements (unless she is deliberately ignoring a health issue, a life-or-death situation, of course). Grievance writers really, really must recognize this truth: the topic has to be something the reader can do something about, and the grievance has to remain on the topic. Unimportant details that "reveal" other injustices cloud the major point. If your Loved One is reading a car magazine and comes across an article on avoiding foot fungus, how likely will they be to read the article? That article is not "on topic."

Second, the ONE issue has to be clearly stated up front. The grievance forms should be available in both the housing units and the library. If not—that's a grievance issue too! The grievance reader is trudging through a stack of grievances—not just that one, sterling, essential, so-special grievance.

Thus the grievance issue should be clear, short, and written after the inmate has already talked with the officer/official (informal process first). If someone needs a doctor, then he/she should write at the very top, "I Need a Doctor!" Inmates might find good examples of being up front by practicing when they read newspapers: in the old days, journalists stated Who, What, Why, When, Where, and How in the first paragraphs. Today's writers? Not so much! Irritating reading, right? Remind your Loved One that their readers have no patience: they require an up-front, simple message or they move on to read the next grievance in the pile.

Third, the issue has to be timely.

Inmates need to file within 15 days of the problem, or as soon after they learn of it as possible. For example, when inmates read articles you send in about something that happened in their hometown, but happened three weeks before, it's certainly interesting—but not much else. They can't generally act on that information. Neither can prison officials if that grievance is about something in the past. (Sometimes, late information is better than none—think of the tainted water after the floods, for instance! Learning that inmates were told to "boil water" without any means of boiling is important, even though late. It sets the stage after informal, Step 1 and Step 2, for a court review.) But generally, we need to recognize that essential timing allows essential repairs to prison condition problems.

Speaking of timely, TDC has 40 days to respond to the grievance; thus, all inmates MUST keep a calendar and a copy of the dated grievance. Officials can issue a continuance while they investigate, but that has to be in writing, and the inmate must keep a copy. It might be useful to send a copy outside, too, because we keep hearing about toss-ups with many legal documents destroyed, despite TDC rules. I know it's hard to make copies, hard to send out with the stamp restrictions. But that is the reality we deal with.

Fourth, the grievance cannot have vulgar language or cannot threaten.

Get real. Of course the reader will auto-stamp it. I would too. Inmates must practice both patience and also common curtesy. When they return Outside, they will benefit from practicing curtesy. We all ask for it Out Here, too, especially if

someone is asking for our help. It might help if family members can send in examples of polite requests, polite arguments. No sense looking at online news for these examples: the political world has descended to a level below animal. Instead, see if you can find a newspaper or magazine's op ed piece that argues a difficult point. Right now in Austin, for example, voters are asked to decide on another expensive bond issue. There are strong reasons pro and con. You might send in opposing columns to help your Loved One see how to use facts and short paragraphs, facts and clear reference to policy. Especially in the prison environment, threats must be taken seriously. They have no place in a grievance where the writer is trying to persuade.

I believe in reading. I believe that reading effective writing will strengthen someone's writing skills. You can find effective writing on the back page of Sports Illustrated. You can even find effective writing in an advertisement for insurance. Think of this as a treasure hunt: find examples of clear and persuasive writing that you can share with Loved Ones. If you can offer examples of clear writing to those Inside, you are helping them write more persuasively. Let me know what you've sent, and if it helped! n

How Can you Help TIFA?



During the Holidays, you can help TIFA by connecting your purchases with the programs below. It does not cost you anything other than time to sign up and using your card when you make purchases. Also, ask your family and friends to connect with these companies.

AmazonSmile – Go to smile.amazon.com and sign in. You can then select TIFA as you charity.

Randall's/Tom Thumb – Take your Randall's card to the customer service counter and fill out an application for the Good Neighbor Program. All you need is your card number and the charity number for TIFA is **13339**.

Kroger – Go to Kroger.com and register or go to the store for a card. If you register on line, you can choose you own ID. The number to use for Kroger's rewards program for TIFA is **82117**. n

News from the Chapters

A Newcomer's Perspective & the PACT Conference

By Paula Hudson - Austin

I am a newcomer to every part of this system: Experiencing the County-level justice system, newly entering the TDCJ system, finding the angels here on earth who form TIFA, and lastly, attending my first PACT Conference in Huntsville on October 21, 2017. If you have not attended a PACT Conference in person, I beg you to find a way to get to the next conference in 2019. It's only one day, and it is free. The information you get, however, is priceless.

The immediate thing that comes to me is the mind-boggling amount of information the family or friend of an incarcerated loved one needs to know and navigate. Overwhelming doesn't adequately cover what someone unfamiliar with the system must learn to help our loved ones. It is a secret to no one that the "justice" system is horribly broken, but that fact does not negate how desperately our loved ones need us to do what we can in a dizzying system of agencies, rules, and laws.

If you add financial burdens to the list that can freeze you into inaction out of fear, you end up with a lot of incarcerated persons left to navigate a system from the "inside" without access to a fraction of the tools or information they need to be their own advocates.

So let me say first and foremost, from someone who is in exactly the same place you are: JUST BREATHE. Accept that you cannot do it all, but resolve to do what you can, as you can. That's all anyone can ask. The information provided by TIFA and from conferences such as PACT can give you both guidance and reassurance that you are doing the right things.

The most important thing you can do is create a list of what needs to be done specific to your loved one. Then, prioritize that list into what you can do now, and what must wait. For example, I am exceptionally lucky. My loved one has a short sentence, so I'm on a completely

different track than someone who has a loved one with a long sentence. Since my loved one has a short sentence, I spent my time at the PACT Conference at these sessions:

- Texas Board of Pardons and Paroles
- TDCJ Parole Division
- TDCJ Reentry and Integration Division
- Health Services Division
- TDCJ Manufacturing Agribusiness and Logistics Division.

That's five sessions in one short day. I wanted to do more, but I haven't figured out how to clone myself so I can be in two places at once. But what I learned has given me information I need moving forward, and peace of mind that I'm doing all I can.

I know some folks whose loved one has a lengthy sentence. They focused on meeting the Warden of their loved one's unit in person. Putting a personal face to a name is invaluable and just shaking the Warden's hand can have more affect than you can imagine on a future time when you need help or advice.

The point of this is that there is extensive information available to us, but the burden does fall on us to be the advocates for our incarcerated loved one. The good news is, you don't have to do it alone. If you aren't active in a TIFA Chapter, that's should be your first priority. The road becomes so much more navigable when you aren't travelling alone, and TIFA is the co-pilot you want on this journey. n

Announcing our New Chapter in New Braunfels!

We are proud to announce our newest TIFA Chapter in New Braunfels, Texas. Located in one of the fastest growing area in Texas, they are meeting on the first Thursday of every month at 7:00 pm. Their address is:

Peace Lutheran Church-Cafe
1147 South Walnut
New Braunfels, TX 78132
(210) 606-8584

n

Chapter Meetings Around the State

During Nov & Dec our chapters will be celebrating the holidays and signing cards. So check your emails and the TIFA website for days and times, especially when the meetings fall on a holiday and need to be rescheduled.

We will announce our meeting speaker schedule for next year as soon as it is available. n



How Can you Help? -Remember Us

As we start the holiday season we also begin our end of year fundraising. Fundraising for non-profits is always a difficult, continuous and necessary chore.

We just finished our SECC campaign and thank you to all those who participated and selected TIFA as your charity.

I know some of you have already started your Christmas shopping and as you shop, an easy and painless way to help TIFA is to select TIFA as your charity on AmazonSmile. Amazon contributes pennies of every purchase to TIFA and those pennies can really add up.

Next on our radar is GivingTuesday. GivingTuesday started as a response to commercialization and consumerism in the post-Thanksgiving season of Black Friday and Cyber Monday. Please visit our website at TIFA.org to donate.

Last but not least, as you think of those end of year donations for tax purposes, TIFA is a 501(c)3 and any contributions to TIFA are tax deductible.

And whether you are in the free-world or incarcerated, we ALWAYS appreciate donations and stamps.

Thank you to everyone who has supported us during the year and we are looking forward to a very active and successful New Year. n

How Can you Help? - Tell Your Friends & Family About TIFA

About 200,000 adult men and women are incarcerated at any one time in county jails and state correctional facilities in Texas. The state has the unenviable distinction of having more individuals behind bars than any other state in the country. Imagine our voice if we stood together. TIFA.org [n](#)

How Can you Help? -Tell Us Your Story

By Becky Haigler - Dallas

You ask what you can do to help? Telling your story will help. Your story can help move reform bills forward or help change conditions inside TDCJ.

All of us have had experience with Texas' massive prison and justice system – and those experiences often illustrate the problems that TIFA hopes to change.

But we need your voice, your voice can make a difference. And Texans, communities, churches, and lawmakers need to hear your voices from all across this state.

We want stories showing Texas imprisons too many people, for too long, sometimes for reasons that aren't very good; stories that show the current state of the system is not making our state safer, just warehousing more people at greater cost. We want stories that show prisoners who have turned their lives around and should be given greater consideration in parole applications.

One of the things we love about TIFA is talking with people who are walking the same walk. Even if co-workers, church, or community groups know you have a loved one in prison and want to be supportive, they don't really understand unless they've been there too. But stories are a powerful way to experience things second hand. Think of a book or movie you loved as a child that has stayed with you forever. Stories that last can be happy or sad, suspenseful or serene, but something about good storytelling keeps an idea alive in your mind. We are inviting you to be part of a storytelling project that

will further the aims of TIFA.

TIFA is always at work helping prison families and making things better for our loved ones inside. We believe that even people who have committed awful crimes are capable of change. We are uniquely placed to see the need for safe communities as well as seeing that our prison system needs many reforms, not only for the comfort of families and loved ones, but to make the best use of the taxpayers' resources while actually achieving "corrections" of offenders.

As we prepare for a new push in the 2019 Texas legislature we want to put real faces to our statistics, so that our lawmakers, and our neighbors who vote for them, can get a feel for our lives and the lives of our loved ones...who are human beings worthy of being treated with dignity and being allowed to demonstrate readiness for a second chance.

It will take lawmakers from both parties, and help from you, to change Texas laws and policies that lockup our loved ones randomly and excessively while doing so little to make us safe. Help us!

Will you share your story? Or ask your loved one to share a story? Our editors will be selecting stories and original artwork, no more than 8 ½ X 11", to be on the TIFA website for public viewing. Summaries of stories may appear in the TIFA newsletter to encourage people to go and read more. Eventually there may be a booklet to share, especially when we visit legislators to promote bills we want to see passed.

How can you submit a story and perhaps an original drawing, or a photo of other inmate artwork? Keep in mind the goal...stories of

inmates or families relating to the "Second Look" bill, good time/work time credit for all, or the need for independent oversight of TDCJ.

Write your story...500 words or less... shorter than this article. Do your best, but know that we will edit for length, spelling, clarity, etc.

Add full name and contact information and whether we may use your full name or if you prefer first name and initial. For stories or art by inmates, give the TDCJ number. Include a sentence stating that you give TIFA unlimited permission to use your story and artwork with no compensation. "By submitting my story I agree that you can share my story, my first name, my city and zipcode with lawmakers and the media. If they want more information about me or my story, I ask that you contact me to get additional permission."

Artwork must be mailed to TIFA Story Project, P.O. Box 300220, Austin TX 78703-0004. Send a good quality photocopy as artwork will not be returned. Stories may also be mailed, or emailed to tifa@tifa.org, with the story pasted into the body of the email. No attachments to emails will be opened. [n](#)

A Special Offer for those who are currently incarcerated in the TDCJ

☐ I would like a \$10.00 (one year/4 issues) Subscription to the TIFA Contact Newsletter

I understand that this is not a TIFA membership. My \$10 includes four(4) issues of a yearly subscription. TIFA is not responsible for any lost issues that are not provided because of a change in unit OR TDCJ fails to deliver. The subscriber is responsible for notifying TIFA of ALL address changes at least 45 days prior to the next issue. Issues will be delivered in middle of Feb, May, Aug and Nov of each year.

☐ \$ _____ Donations are always cheerfully accepted!

Inmate Name (please print clearly)

TDCJ Number

TDCJ Unit

Signature

Date

Please mail your TDCJ Trust Fund money order to:

TIFA PO BOX 300220 Austin, TX 78703

ACCI has added new life skill correspondence courses to their list of available courses.

ACCI's inmate life skills workbooks are easy to read and are written in story format. The workbooks are written about real people with real problems, and how they overcame their obstacles. The workbooks give time-tested skills which have been proven to help people become happier and more productive. And as someone completes each course, ACCI will send a certificate that can be included in a parole packet.

Here are some key benefits for inmates:

- The price has been reduced from \$85.00 to \$45.00 for inmates only,
- They can work at their own pace and with a "coach" (another inmate) of their choosing,
- Our workbooks are proven to successfully challenge criminal thinking,
- We focus on helping offenders conquer self-defeating thoughts and behaviors,
- Can be completed on their own time and don't interfere with jail or prison life,
- Our courses can often satisfy court or legal requirements.

What will your family member receive for \$45.00?

- Workbook of choice
- Instructions
- Prepaid self addressed envelope (postage paid by ACCI)
- Completion certificate

Courses now available include:

W111 - Anger Management
W112 - Offender Corrections
W114 - Substance Abuse
W115 - Delinquentes correcciones
W116 - Contentious Relationships
W117 - Parenting
W118 - Cognitive Awareness
W119 - Offender Responsibility
W121 - Theft/Shoplifting
W124 - Employment
W128 - DUI
W129 - Domestic Violence

You can visit the ACCI web site www.inmateliveskills.com and order the course of your choice or if you are incarcerated

have a friend or relative order it for you. You can also send a check for \$45 from a jail/prison account sent to ACCI. Be sure to include a complete mailing address (including name and TDCJ number).

Please send mail to ACCI - CF, PO Box 1910, Orem, UT 84059-1910. [n](#)

TIFA's New Facebook Page - TIFA-Reentry -

Every year 40,000 people cycle in and out of the TDCJ. And with that there is an extraordinary need for reentry services especially when we think about the barriers that they are faced with including housing and employment. You add transportation and immediate need for basic living necessities such as food and clothing the challenges can be overwhelming.

TIFA now has a Reentry page where we can collect resources, not only for parole packets, but also for individuals who have to navigate reentry. We hope that after it gains more and more members and resources it will be as valuable to you as our other TIFA Facebook pages.

<https://www.facebook.com/groups/401683470234866/> [n](#)



Abbott Appoints a New Parole Board Member

On September 27th, Governor Abbott appointed Brian Long to the Board of Pardons and Paroles for a term that will expire February 1, 2023. He will serve as a Board Member in the Palestine Board office. Brian Long of Kilgore was previously a hearing officer for the Texas Board of Pardons & Paroles. Long received an

Associate in Applied Science in criminal justice from Tyler Junior College and a Bachelor of Science in criminal justice from The University of Texas at Tyler.

Below are the approval rates from the Boards during 2016. Many factors affect the approval rates such as the prison units reviewed and the risk assessment scores. To find more information you can visit the Board of Pardons and Paroles website under <http://www.tdcj.texas.gov/bpp/publications/publications.html> to access the full report on the Board's voting statistics.

(BM= Board Member, C= Commissioner)

Amarillo

James LaFavers, BM	43.48%
Charles Shipman, C *	22.04%
Marsha Moberley, C	32.79%
Raymond Gonzalez, C **	33.33%

Angleton

Cynthia Taus, BM	40.75%
Lynn Ruzicka, C	33.43%
Ira Evans, C	27.78%

Austin

Ed Robertson, BM	55.73%
Troy Fox, C	46.52%
Elvis Hightower, C	44.91%

Gatesville

David Gutierrez, Chair	86.82%
Roel Tejada, C	37.29%
Lee Ann Eck-Massingill, C	37.35%

Huntsville

Federico Rangel, BM	42.03%
Tony Garcia, C	27.73%
Wanda Saliagas, C	23.90%

Palestine

Michelle Skyrme, BM ***	36.07%
Brian Long BM ****	--
Paul Kiel, C	32.50%
James Hensarling, C	39.06%

San Antonio

Fred Solis, BM	43.07%
Charles Speier, C	34.58%
Anthony Ramirez, C	31.72%

*Charles Shipman served as a Parole Commissioner from 9-1-15 to 5-31-16.

** Raymond Gonzalez served a a Parole Commissioner from 7-1-16 to 8-31-16.

*** Michelle Skyrme's term ended in July.

**** Brian Long is the newest Board Member and currently in training. [n](#)



Estelle Unit Parole Forum Q&A Part 4

By Sharon Bass

This is Part Four, and the final set of questions from a Question and Answer Session we had at the Estelle Unit at the end of last year. Over 200 inmates attended and after a two hour presentation there was no time to answer all the questions. We promised to answer the questions and send them back to Estelle but also thought that everyone would have the same questions.

38. When we see re-entry, why do they say that we are going home, but then later parole comes and sets us off again, and some of us don't have any cases. That's false hope for us.

Everyone who is within a specified time from parole eligibility will see re-entry. The re-entry staff do not know, nor have any say in your parole approval or denial. Seeing re-entry does not mean that you are going home. It means you are eligible for parole and they are processing your identification papers and performing other necessary documentation for when you do eventually make parole.

39. How much time does a parole violator with no new conviction have to serve before they are re-paroled out?

That is up to the parole board. You must make parole even if it is a technical violation.

40. How many times can they use the same reason to set you off or deny you?

The Parole Board can deny your parole many times and have you do a serve-all.

41. Does the S2 help me on my parole?

Absolutely.

42. Why do we keep getting the same excuses when we get a set-off? My last major case was in 2003, and I was still given a 2 year set-off

The same denial reason can be used each year.

43. How can you find out if you have been protested or if you're currently being protested?

Protests are confidential and the information is sealed and you will not be able to find out.

44. I heard a lot of FI-6 has been changed to FI-1. Why? Is it true there no money for the programs?

There is a time limit for sending someone to a program. If that time has passed and the person has not been sent to the program, the parole decision is changed to an FI-1.

45. If it's a privilege, then what good is work-time and goodtime?

Parole is a privilege, good time and work time credits are earned and used for calculation of parole review eligibility only.

46. I am doing stacked sentences (3x). In 2005, I was interviewed on the last sentence. I told everyone I thought this was a mistake. I was told there were no mistakes in my records. However, when I was granted parole on this sentence, I was paroled in the second sentence. When I questioned about this I was told that it was a mistake and now I did not make parole on the last sentence, but the first one. I never was interviewed on this sentence. Why am I being punished when I tried in 2005 to correct any mistake?

Contact the State Counsel for Offenders for direction. Without looking at your sentence and judgment that question cannot be answered.

47. Why won't or can't the parole board take a more active part to investigate or get involved in an individual's case whereby such individual is asserting or making a claim of actual innocence based on a possibility of an actual

wrongful conviction whereby in the materials I have read or been proved with in the past shows such board members are supposed to solicit the Governor of the state for either clemency or a gubernatorial pardon to help prove the actual innocence claim? Recently, I submitted a package to parole for it to consider containing a list of actual evidence proving my actual innocence but all they have done was to include such in my permanent case file for next review in 2019... they didn't even consider it. Why?

The parole board members or commissioners cannot investigate or retry a case. Except for one (1) commissioner, no board member or other commissioners have a law degree. Even if they did, that is not the function of the parole board.

When you submit an application for Clemency, which is very tedious and detailed, you must have a positive vote from 4 of the 7 Board Members for the application to be submitted to the Governor. The Governor has the final say if Clemency is granted.

48. I am under the one-fourth law. Why is TDCJ making me do more of my sentence?

You are probably serving more than one sentence in TDCJ. You must serve the time required by law on each conviction before you will be reviewed for a parole release. In a situation of multiple convictions each conviction will be reviewed for eligibility. You may have cases that fall under the one-fourth (1/4) law as well as the one-third (1/3) law. You must be approved for release on all of your convictions in order to be released.

36. I have over 100% of my sentence served, why am I still here?

You are probably serving a sentence that is not eligible for mandatory supervision release. If so, you will not be released until approved for a parole release or until you reach your maximum expiration date and discharge the conviction. [n](#)



Lt. Gov. Patrick & Speaker Straus Release Interim Charges

Between legislative sessions, the Texas Lieutenant Governor and Speaker of the House of Representatives appoint Interim Committees to study important issues that help guide the Texas Legislature's decisions in the future. These interim committees hold hearings and take public testimony. Their findings will affect actions taken during the next regular session that begins Jan. 2019.

Below are the interim charges given to the House Corrections Committee and the Senate Criminal Justice Committee.

House Committee on Corrections

1. Evaluate the Texas Department of Criminal Justice response to Hurricane Harvey. Recommend any changes that could improve the operational stability of state criminal justice institutions following a natural disaster and changes that would allow for a more effective response.
2. Examine the use of social workers and peer support specialists in the Texas criminal justice system to assist individuals on probation, on parole, or who have been discharged, in order to reduce recidivism and improve outcomes. Identify best practices and make recommendations for legislative action.
3. Examine the current Texas criminal justice system policies and practices regarding 17- to 25-year-olds, specific to probation, parole, state jail confinement, and discharge from the Texas Department of Criminal Justice or county jail. Review any gaps in services that may be causing this population to recidivate. Make recommendations to improve the state's response to the needs of this population in order to lower revocation, re-arrest, and re-incarceration rates.
4. Examine treatment options, services, and programs available to women in institutional

settings, on community supervision, on parole, and in community-based programs. Make recommendations for best strategies to address the needs of women in the Texas criminal justice system.

5. Review the Texas state jail system. Examine its original intent, sentencing guidelines, effectiveness, and recidivism rates. Make recommendations for changes in the state jail system. (Joint charge with the House Committee on Criminal Jurisprudence)
6. Study policies and protocols within the Texas Department of Criminal Justice to prevent the spread of infectious diseases. Examine when protocols are implemented and their efficacy in protecting the health and safety of inmates and state employees.
7. Review assessments used by the Board of Pardons and Paroles and parole panels to determine an inmate's risk of recidivism for purposes of granting parole and the use of GPS technology to monitor offenders.
8. Monitor Texas prison system heat-related litigation currently making its way through the courts. Monitor Prison Rape Elimination Act (PREA) compliance within Texas state and county criminal justice facilities.
9. Monitor the agencies and programs under the Committee's jurisdiction and oversee the implementation of relevant legislation passed by the 85th Legislature.

Senate Criminal Justice Committee

1. Identify Successful Re-Entry Programs: Study current reentry programs and procedures across Texas' adult criminal justice system and identify which are most effective. Review best practices and make recommendations to ensure that incarcerated individuals who are released from a county or city jail, state jail, or the Texas Department of Criminal Justice have adequate supervision and access to employment, housing, treatment, and other support programs to allow for successful reentry and integration into the community and to prevent recidivism.
2. State Jail Review to Improve Outcomes: Perform a comprehensive analysis and study of the Texas state jail system. Examine the access to and use of rehabilitation, vocation, and education programs. Determine whether current programs are effective and if there are efficiencies that can be found to reduce recidivism and improve outcomes.

3. Telemedicine in Correctional Facilities: Review current availability and best practices in the state regarding the use of telemedicine for inmates in city or county jail, state jail, or the Texas Department of Criminal Justice. Examine and make recommendations on whether access to care and outcomes can be improved through the expanded use of telemedicine for medical and mental health services, and whether expansion would create efficiencies. Examine barriers to implementation and expansion of telemedicine in correctional facilities.

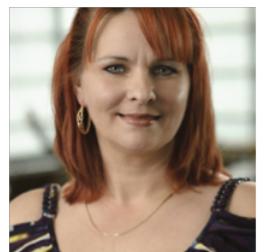
4. Human Trafficking Awareness and Prevention: Study opportunities to increase awareness of human trafficking through public awareness campaigns, among local officials, and within public school districts including the identification of potential human trafficking and stash houses as well as how and where to report. Examine the Human Trafficking Prevention Business Partnership Program at the Office of the Secretary of State and provide recommendations for increasing participation of Texas businesses in the fight against human trafficking.

5. Monitoring: Monitor the implementation of legislation addressed by the Senate Criminal Justice Committee during the 85th Legislature and make recommendations for any legislation needed to improve, enhance, and/or complete implementation of the following:

- Senate Bill 12, Relating to the creation of a grant program to assist law enforcement agencies with the purchase of bulletproof vests and body armor;
- Senate Bill 30, Relating to the inclusion of instruction regarding interaction with peace officers in the required curriculum for certain public school students and in driver education courses and to civilian interaction training for peace officers; and
- Senate Bill 1326, Relating to procedures regarding criminal defendants who are or may be persons with a mental illness or an intellectual disability and to certain duties of the Office of Court Administration of the Texas Judicial System related to persons with mental illness. [n](#)

Legislative Updates

By Lauren Johnson.



We did it! If you are reading this then you have survived the heat of the Texas summer, and Hurricane Harvey and the other disasters that followed and that is

something to be thankful for! I hope that your families also have weathered the storms.

Since I last wrote things have been moving full speed ahead as organizations strategize and plan for the next legislative session which will begin in just a little over a year. I personally have gotten letters from friends that I write on the inside that have told me they received or borrowed the newsletter to read and saw my picture there next to the article I submitted. If memory serves me, I think I have been asking you to practice telling your stories. I have been making that request of my friends as well, just ask them, they will tell you! There are several reasons for this. Even if you decide you don't want to share your story with anyone I want you to write it out. I actually want you to write it with the intention of no one ever seeing it and then when it is complete let it sit for a little while, go back and read it, then determine if you want to share it or not. When you write it I want you to think about and write about the moments that stand out to you as having impacted you in a meaningful way for better or worse and when you do connect to the emotions that you felt then, and also now when you think about that person in that time.

Aside from the personal benefits of storytelling, it is one of the most effective ways to change policy, and to connect us. We tend to not remember data and research statistics but we remember stories. We see ourselves and our loved ones when we hear a story.

As an example, there is a woman who lives in Washington State, she is formerly incarcerated and just graduated law school. To add to her accomplishments she was accepted as a Skadden Fellow which is a very coveted fellowship for lawyers who work in public interest law. This lady applied to the bar and was denied entrance based on her criminal history. Different states have different rules about this but in Washington they could have allowed her to take the bar. The ACLU of Washington along with a number of organizations nationally signed on to an Amicus brief that is going to be heard in the Supreme Court, the first case of its kind since 1985. I will be attending this hearing to support our sister as she fights not only for herself, but for the ability for all of us to be able to be judged on our merits and in our totality and not just our conviction history.

You may have seen a recent 60 Minutes interview with her friend and colleague Shon Hopwood, who served time in federal prison, was granted entrance and passed the bar and now is a law school professor at Georgetown University Law Center. I tell you these stories because I think you can see that these stories are game changers.

These are examples of the things people have been able to do after being in the places we have been. I want you to know that your story isn't over, and may only just be getting started! When you finish writing out the story you have lived up to now, I want you to create a vision story for the future. If there were no obstacles, what would you want to do in the future? Create that story in multi-dimensions, how does it feel, smell, look like, what are you doing, who is with you, where are you at?

Your story is important because you are important. Since I started working at the ACLU of Texas I have started creating my work plan and it will include trips to El Paso, East Texas, Corpus Christi, and parts of Houston. If you have a loved one in those areas who is interested in doing what they can to help criminal justice reform please have them reach out to me at LJohnson@aclutx.org ! n



A Few Words

by Tracy P Williams
(Coffield Field Minister)

When a pebble is thrown into a pond, there is a ripple effect that takes place in the water. The ramification of the pebble breaking the surface of the water forever changes the pond and cannot be undone. Similarly, an inmate's life is usually the result of selfish, chaotic choices affecting not only him, but his family and others as well. "Doing time," no matter how long, is not exclusively for offenders. The families are doing time with their incarcerated loved ones, too. Hearing a few words from home, however, can make all the difference in an offender's emotional state.

Offenders are often emotionally fragile.

Pre-existing mental conditions are a complication, and other offenders are feeling unbalanced by short term crises that could be addressed if the offender felt someone was listening. Most feel guilty about the lives they have destroyed by their bad choices. Others stress over things which they have no control. Often, anxiety of their family's well-being is the trigger that places an inmate in a depressed state. For instance, crises like super storms Harvey, Irma, and Maria incited inmates to worry about their families. Just a few words can calm their darkest fears.

Hope is essential to what it means to be human. Despite what an offender has done, they are still human. A loss of hope devastates, demoralizes, and handicaps. Family support is essential to an inmate's hope for the future. It instills a sense of purpose and builds humanizing connection to free society. Sometimes an isolated inmate's thoughts and feelings can overpower their need to survive, or cause them to envision things that aren't real. Usually there will be an outcry for attention when an inmate resorts to self-harm. If they are extremely depressed, a convict might turn to contraband and illegal substances to cope, or to gain a temporary false escape from reality. In the worst case, an inmate attempts suicide.

There is an alarming rise in the number of attempted suicides in Texas state prisons. Recently, TDCJ officials eliminated solitary confinement, a measure used to punish offenders for more serious disciplinary infractions. Here on the largest Texas prison unit, Coffield, and across the state, offender ministers (Field Ministers) talk with other offenders in hope of stopping the next suicide. While these measures are helpful, they pale in comparison to a few words from home.

There is power in our words to heal, empower, motivate, and give hope. It is up to state prison officials, offenders, communities, and families to restore the incarcerated to society again as whole human beings. Family members, however, have the biggest impact on the well-being of their loved ones by a few words through Jpay, letters, or visits. Just like the pebble thrown into a pond that disturbs its calm, a few words sent to an offender by his family calms the internal storms raging within. n



Texas Inmate Families Association

Strengthening families through support, education, and advocacy

TIFA
PO Box 300220
Austin, TX 78703-0004

CONTACT
Vol.22 No. 4 Oct 2017

TIFA Chapters

Amarillo

Currently Reorganizing
Check our website
www.tifa.org
for meeting information

Austin- Central

2nd Tuesday, 7:00 pm (Starting in Dec)
AGE Center
3710 Cedar Street
Austin, Tx 78703
(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, 7:00 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 #103/105
Dallas, TX 75220
214-792-0649

Ft. Worth

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

Houston

2nd Tuesday, 7:00 pm
CrossWalk Center
2103 N Main
(N Main at Marie, entrance on the
Keene Street side)
Houston, TX 77009
(281) 435-4143

Humble

2nd Thursday, 7:00 pm
First United Methodist Church
800 E Main St
Humble, Texas 77355
(936) 442-0859

Killeen - Harker Heights

2nd Thursday, 6:00 pm
VFW (Ladies Auxiliary)
201 VFW Dr
Harker Heights, TX 76548
(254) 289-9429

McAllen

3rd Tuesday, 6:00
Calvary Baptist Church
Slayton Building 2nd Floor
1600 Harvey Drive
McAllen, Texas 78501
(956) 280-0951

Nacogdoches/Lufkin

3rd Saturday 10:00 am
First Baptist Church
411 North Street
Nacogdoches, TX 65961
(936) 564-4546

New Braunfels

1st Thursday, 7:00 pm
Peace Lutheran Church-Cafe
1147 South Walnut
New Braunfels, TX 78132
(210) 606-8584

Paris

2nd Saturday at 2:00 pm
Christ Community Church (in building
with Nautilus fitness)
116 S Collegiate Dr
Paris, TX 75460
(903) 495-0018

Pearland - South Houston

3rd Tuesday, 6:30 pm (exc Nov & Dec)
Manvel Bible Chapel
4230 FM 1128
Pearland, TX 77584
(831) 592-3438

San Angelo

2nd Thursday at 6:00 pm
Immanuel Baptist Church
90 E 14th St
San Angelo, TX 76903
(325) 704-7445

San Antonio

2nd Tuesday, 6:30 pm
St. Vincent De Paul Catholic
Church Parish Hall
4222 Southwest Loop 410
San Antonio, TX
(210) 387-1558

San Antonio - North

3rd Thursday, 6:30 pm
St Marks Evg Catholic Church
1602 Thousand Oaks Dr.
San Antonio, TX
(915) 204-5870

Tyler

2nd Thursday, 6:30 pm
Freedom Fellowship
2915 SSE Loop 323
Tyler, Texas 75701
(903) 504-9771

Waco

3rd Thursday, 6:30 pm
Waco Hispanic Chamber
of Commerce
915 La Salle Ave
Waco, TX 76706
(254)744-1789

*Check our website and calendar for new TIFA Chapters starting near you. www.tifa.org
If you are interested in starting a TIFA chapter in your area, please contact the TIFA office. (512) 371-0900 or send an email to tifa@tifa.org*