

# TIFA CONTACT

THE OFFICIAL NEWSLETTER OF TEXAS INMATE FAMILIES ASSOCIATION Vol. 25 No. 1 Jan. 2020



## The First Regional PACT Conference Held in Houston

On January 25, 2020 family members and members of the TDCJ staff came together for the first Regional PACT Conference in Houston, TX. Our estimate is that there were over 100 TIFA family members, friends and others at the conference eager to hear the presentations and meet face to face with TDCJ upper management.

It is great to be at a meeting where everyone is there to talk to you and willing to answer your questions.

The following information is from my notes that day. You will also find more information on phones, visitation and other issues peppered throughout this newsletter.

**Expanding Medical Services-** The fastest growing population in TDCJ is the portion of the population that is over 55 years old. In 2019, there were over 20,000 people in this category.

An inmate's physiological age is actually 10 years older than their biological age and this population brings a unique, complex set of challenges. They have more chronic conditions and more medical issues. TDCJ currently needs to add 6 wheelchair beds every month to meet the needs of this population.

The sheltered housing units allows a safe place to provide more medical care when someone returns from the hospital or

needs closer medical care than is provided in general population. These units also have increased medical hours.

**Sheltered Housing Units** - Designed to help support the growing population of vulnerable offenders whose medical needs cannot be met in a general population environment.

- o 95 beds at Telford
- o 14 beds at Carole Young
- o 54 beds at Jester III
- o 186 beds at Stiles
- o 167 beds at Pack
- o Proposed program expansion at Murray(143) and Gib Lewis

**Heat Litigation-** TDCJ has identified 13,180 inmates that have a heat sensitivity score due to age, a medical condition or because of medication that requires a cool bed.

Of these inmates 69.6% have been placed in a cool bed and TDCJ is on target to have all inmates requiring a cool bed to be placed by the end of the year.

Placement requires individual evaluation of each of these inmate's needs. The issues that need to be considered in moving someone to a cool bed include security level and medical and physical condition. They also have to figure out how to meet the program needs of each individual.

In order to accommodate all these inmates it will require infrastructure modifications at several facilities, ranging from dayroom modification to installation of additional security equipment.

**Inspect2Protect-** Ms. Lorie Davis, CID Director started this part of her presentation with her thoughts on the TDCJ mission and the safety of the people working and living inside the prison. "If people don't feel safe, it's hard to change. And drugs are bad choices. It's a bad choice to do drugs in prison and when they are on drugs in prison people make even worse decisions. When inmates are on drugs they are harming themselves,

## Commissary News!!



For the last couple of months it has been tough to get groceries at the unit commissaries. The problem has been that TDCJ hasn't had enough truck drivers for the warehouse 18 wheeler delivery trucks. Finally, TDCJ has been approved to rent some smaller, bobtail trucks that do not require CDLs and has found additional officers to drive the trucks. They are now working overtime, weekends and holidays trying to catch up.

The E-comm inventory has also suffered. At one time it was so low, there were only 17 items in stock out of the possible 100 items that are usually available. But as of Jan 25, they were back up to 77 items available.

Now that the commissaries are slowly being restocked, TDCJ is putting limits on what inmates can buy so everyone will have a chance to purchase some things.

A nice surprise was that TDCJ has decided that midway through the first quarter, on Feb 15th, that **the E-comm spending limit will be reset to \$60** to make up for the trouble over the last couple of months. This is a one time reset. ♥



## TIFA Contact

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TIFA is a non-profit 501 (c)(3) of the U.S. Internal Revenue Code.

Membership in TIFA is open to anyone. A Basic membership is \$25 per year and includes one newsletter subscription to the member e-mail address. A Basic Plus membership of \$35 per year includes all family members residing in one household and the inmate newsletter.

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### Find us!

**Note:** We read all mail but cannot answer every letter.

Our mission is strengthening families through support, education and advocacy.



## From the Executive Director - Jennifer Erschabek

**W**ell, what's new? It's been a heck of a week with the PACT Conference last weekend and the fallout from all the visitation and mail changes coming. Families are anxious, upset and nervous. Advocates are outraged that once again the burden of one of the biggest problems in TDCJ is being placed on the shoulders of the families with policies that seem arbitrary and unnecessary.

We have lived through bogus cases and planted contraband (and it still continues). Guards curse, harass, pepper spray and ignore inmate needs. But not all the blame lies with the guards, a lot of people are in prison because they are trouble makers.

But taking away our simple pleasure of sending Christmas cards to people in prison? And screening us for drugs with narcotic dogs? Or my favorite- arbitrarily taking people off of a visitation list. And nobody has yet to mention the new body scanners.

My question is how much contraband can a visitor smuggle into a unit if the inmate they are visiting is stripped search coming and going from visitation? Families are not the main problem.

Now I will admit, there are some who make bad decisions and try to pull a fast one. And this just makes it difficult for all of us. The guards now have to take things from the vending machines for us at some units....but I digress.

So what's next? On Tuesday I got a call from Rep James White. He wanted to know what I thought about the new changes and I told him the bulk of the drugs do not come in with families or in the mail. I want to see the evidence, I want the number. The new changes seem like a lot of pain for little gain.

I also shared with Rep White that TIFA was already working on the issue of family members being taken off of a visitation list and that I would love the opportunity

to work on visitation in his committee this summer. He agreed and promised to work to include visitation in one of the other interim charges.

During the first week in February, some of the advocate groups will come together to discuss next steps. My solutions are to let more people go home, close more prisons and provide independent oversight.

We need to all come together and not tolerate bad decisions.....let's take a thoughtful look at trouble, collect the data and get the solutions right. ■



## We Welcome Shelley Eklund

**W**e welcome Shelley Eklund to the TIFA Staff as the Director of Organizing and Policy.

Shelley has been a TIFA member since her son's incarceration in 2017. Due to Comal County being one of the largest growing counties in the United States, Shelley saw the need and potential to advocate for and support families of those incarcerated and in October 2017 she started the TIFA New Braunfels Chapter.

Shelley graduated from the Austin Court Reporting Institute with an Associate Degree in Medical & Criminal Transcription. She managed two successful businesses in the Comal County community for over 20 years. Her experience included the management of office personnel, knowledge and experience of accounting, implementing new and innovated software and computer programming.

Shelley is currently attending Howard Payne University, working towards her Bachelor's Degree in Criminal Justice.

Her ultimate goal is for families to be a "voice" for their incarcerated loved one through the education and support TIFA provides.

Shelley has been blessed with three beautiful children. ■



others, the staff and the ones that love them. And it makes it hard for those who want to do the right thing. We have to keep people safe."

**Offender Correspondence-** New, updated mail processes are being put into place to aid in preventing contraband from coming into the units. Inmates will be allowed to receive mail on plain white or ruled paper. Mail received on colored, decorated, cardstock, construction, linen or cotton paper will be denied. The thick papers can be split and SIM cards and money can be inserted into the paper. Another problem with colored or thick paper is you cannot tell if drugs have been applied to it. An inmate will be allowed to see the denied mail but will not be allowed to have it.

Letters sent to inmates should also not contain uninspectable substances such as perfume, stickers, lipstick, bodily fluids, powdery substances, artwork using paint, glitter, glue, or tape. This is not a new rule, just a reminder of things that already are not allowed.

The biggest, most unpopular change will be that purchased greeting cards will no longer be allowed after March 1. Children will still be allowed to use crayons, markers and colored pencils to create cards. You can also scan a card, print it on white paper and send it in or attach it to a j-pay. Some states already only allow electronic mail and some scan all mail.

Only ten photos will be allowed per envelope; photos in excess of ten shall be denied to the inmate. Photos that come in the form of a photo book are considered a book and must follow the book regulations regarding nudity and other restrictions. Some inmates use photos to traffic and trade. Magazine clippings will need to be copied onto plain white paper.

TDCJ would also like to encourage families to use electronic j-pays to help cut down on contraband coming into the unit. TDCJ does not receive any kick-back from j-pays. All monies either go to j-pay or to



For the safety of everyone who spends any time in a secure TDCJ facility – offenders, visitors and staff – TDCJ’s contraband policy is changing to help keep our prisons safe for all.

The Inspect 2 Protect program introduces new regulations for offender mail, revises canine and personal search procedures and changes how offenders can receive funds. These new Inspect 2 Protect policies go into effect on March 1, 2020.

These policy revisions are not punitive but are needed to allow for detection and interdiction of easy-to-conceal drugs and technology.

The fight to eliminate contraband has always been fundamental to sound prison management. In prison, contraband becomes a kind of alternative currency and simple issues like an unpaid debt can easily lead to threats, extortion and even physical assault. When contraband involves synthetic drugs like K2, it takes only one small dose for the user to suffer seizures, permanent disability and, in some cases, death.

**In 2019, offenders received over 7.5 million pieces of mail. Approximately 3,500 letters per month have an uninspectable or suspicious substance.**

**Offender Mail**

**Offender mail procedures will be changed as follows:**

- Offenders will only be allowed to receive mail from general correspondents on standard white paper. Mail received on colored, decorated, card stock, construction, linen, or cotton paper will be denied.
- Letters sent to offenders may not contain uninspectable substances such as perfume, stickers, lipstick, bodily fluid, powdery substances or artwork using paint, glitter, glue, or tape.
- Offenders may not receive greeting cards of any kind.
- There is no restriction on the length of incoming or outgoing correspondence; however, a limit of 10 photos will be allowed per envelope.



**TDCJ encourages electronic messaging to reduce the entrance of contraband:**

- In 2019, offenders received approximately 3.5 million pages through electronic messaging, including 1 million attachments.
- The Snap n’ Send program allows family and friends to take a picture and send it through the JPay app. In 2019, offenders received nearly 900,000 photos.



**Searches**

**In an effort to increase staff and offender safety, the following procedures will be implemented:**

Certified narcotic canines will be used strategically to detect narcotics and synthetic marijuana on visitors entering facilities. Searches on staff have already been implemented.

The individual the canine alerts on will not be allowed to visit any offender that visitation cycle (visitation cycle – that weekend). If a certified narcotic canine alerts on a child visitor, all adult visitors accompanying the child will not be allowed to visit any offender that visitation cycle.

Incidents of alerts will be documented. A second alert, regardless of the time frame for an individual, will result in removal from any offender’s visitation list.

**In 2019 there were approximately 2,300 incidents of marijuana, illegal drugs, and/or K2 reported at facilities systemwide.**

**Commissary Accounts**

Only persons on an offender’s visitation or OTS call lists may deposit funds or make Ecomm transactions.

**Scanners**

Wave Millimeter Scanners will be deployed at a select number of high contraband units.



general revenue.

**Trust Fund & E-Comm** - The next biggest change is about inmates being able to mail money out and who is allowed to put money on an inmate's books. Only people who are on the inmate's visitation list and OTS list (this is 30 people) will be allowed to deposit into an inmate's trust fund and purchase E-comms for them. These restrictions are also applied to who the inmate can send money to. We do not have an answer about inmates being able to mail out money to organizations or to order books or magazines.

**Searches Using Canines**— About 2 years ago Ms. Davis was tasked with ramping up the canine drug program and they are about 75% complete of their 3 -yr goal. The dogs are certified by the National Narcotic Detector Dog Association and are certified in four areas: marijuana, cocaine, heroin, and methamphetamines. TDCJ has been teaching the dogs how to search mail, inmate housing areas and now they are working on teaching them to search people. First they are using the dogs to search staff and will eventually use them in the visitation areas. The dogs are currently distributed to high contraband units. When asked, Ms Davis also stated "I have zero tolerance for guards bringing in contraband and will aggressively work to get rid of the dirty officers."

In visitation, there will be a screen between the dog and the handler and the visitor. The dog will pass by, they will ask the visitor to turn around and the dog will pass by again. If the dog alerts you will not be allowed to visit that weekend. If the dog alerts on a child, all the adults in the party will be documented, be denied a visit and advised to be sure that when they return to "come in a way that doesn't cause the dogs to alert." If the dogs alert on two separate visits, you will be removed from the visitation list.

**Removal from a Visitation List** – TDCJ evaluated their program and decided they were not doing a good job of telling visitors when and why they were being taken off the visitation list. In the future, when someone is removed from the visitation list they will automatically send that information for an automatic review. This will help TDCJ make sure they are taking the right people off of the visitation lists. Deputy Dir. Guerrero will now be over this evaluation process.

**Security Precaution Designators (SPD)**

– These designators tell officers of a particular risk associated with an inmate. The SPDs that are now in place include those for staff assault, escaping from security restraints (handcuffs & cells), hostage takers, and escapes. They are going to add one for contraband and the code will be 'CD.' Inmates can get the SPD as a result of a conviction of one of four disciplinary codes: a 10.2 possession of money or tobacco, 12.0 possession of narcotics, marijuana, other illegal drugs or unauthorized drug, 12.1 refusal to submit to a urinalysis, or 16.0 possession of a cell phone. A major conviction of one of these offenses will result in a CD designator to be placed on the inmate. The SPD will help the warden assign that inmate in a way that will cut down on his ability to move around the unit. This will also tell the staff that the inmate has been involved in illegal activity but it will have no bearing on their custody level.

How this will affect families is that if an inmate receives a CD designator families will only have two ways to put money on their books, the automatic bank draft or money orders.

**Video visitation** – The first units to participate in the program will be Wynne and Hutchins and these units will come on-line at the end of March. TDCJ hopes to bring the rest of the units on-line by the end of summer. This is how it works: Inmates at Clements, Connally, Crain, Michael, Stiles, and Wynne with be able to have a video visit with family and friends at the following video visitation units- Garza (Beeville), Hutchins (Dallas), Jester III (Richmond), Montford (Lubbock), Sanchez (El Paso), and Travis (Austin).

TDCJ looked at units that had visitors on visitation lists that traveled long distances and then looked at units with the highest frequency of visitors. From this, TDCJ decided which units to include in the program. The scheduling details are not all worked out but eventually you will be able to schedule the video visits on-line through the Securus website. These will be free visits.

You will be able to schedule visits with inmates between 7 am and 6 pm and when you travel to one of the above units to visit, you will be given priority at check-in. The video visit will NOT replace a regular visit, you will still be able to visit

the same number of hours for a special visit. Ms. Davis also said that you could schedule as many video visits as you wanted. Dress code and identification will be the same as a regular visit and these visits are subject to recording. TDCJ will be working to make this as user-friendly as possible.



Mr. Collier insisted that there is no plan to do away with in-person visitation. They feel that video visitation will be an enhancement and help some people who have to travel long distances to visit. Traveling long distances is costly, is harder on older family members and those with small children and requires a lot of time.

During the presentation Ms Davis did not address the Millimeter scanners. ■



If you missed the Houston PACT Conference OR you are ready to attend the next one, TDCJ has just announced that the next PACT Conference will be March 14th at the Gateway Church in Dallas, Tx. These regional conferences offer great presentations and give you access to TDCJ senior management personnel, including the Board of Pardons and Paroles. This new format is in response to family comments that it was expensive and hard for everyone to get to Huntsville.

**The second regional PACT conference will be held on Saturday, March 14, 2020 at the Gateway Church, 12123 Hillcrest Rd., Dallas Texas.**

TIFA will once again plan to have a pizza party during lunch. So stay tuned for more details.

TDCJ is now busy locating space for the last conference that will be in San Antonio. We will let you know the minute we have more information. ■



# Camp Good News -Registration-

Camp Good News provides a free, inclusive camping experience in a supportive Christian environment for those children ages 10 – 15 who have a family member incarcerated in a county, state or federal prison. Caring counselors emulate godly behavior while fostering healthy relationships, helping equip children with the tools they need to explore the blessings and wonders of self. Through special speakers, worship and other faith-based activities, children experience the unconditional love of God and learn to participate as a positive member of the community. The camp hosts 60 kids (30 boys/30 girls) and is located near Navasota, Texas.

**This year's camp will be August 9 – 13, 2020.**



To request an application for your child to attend have your child's guardian call or email Camp Good News at (936) 662-3842 or edsalpc@yahoo.com. If you are inside the walls, you can also send TIFA a letter and we will send you an application. ■



TIFA Shirts  
5170 Teal Tees - Front, Back  
White Ink

**T-shirts are now available for purchase on the TIFA website! <http://bit.ly/TIFAshirt>**  
**Small-xl: 20\$    2xl-4xl: 22\$**  
**Shipping and handling included.**

## ***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 would like a \$20.00 (two year/8 issues) subscription to the TIFA Contact Newsletter

I understand that this is not a TIFA membership. My \$10 or \$20 includes four(4) or eight(8) 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 failure 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 the middle of Feb, May, Aug, and Nov of each year. Please notify TIFA if your unit changes or you are released.

\_\_\_ \$\_\_\_\_\_ Donations are always cheerfully accepted!

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Inmate Name (please print clearly)

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TDCJ Number TDCJ Unit

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Signature Date

**Please mail your TDCJ Trust Fund money order to:**  
TIFA                      PO Box 300220                      Austin, TX 78703

## HEP C: A NEW LAWSUIT AGAINST TEXAS - Update

On September 18, 2019 the Houston Chronicle covered the latest lawsuit of TDCJ. Similar to the heat lawsuit, this new one could be a game changer for TDCJ.

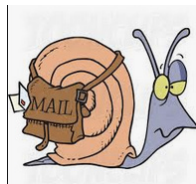
TIFA had this article in our last newsletter and because of the article we received a number of letters in response to it. We have forwarded the inmate letters to the Edwards Law Firm and the writers should be receiving information regarding the lawsuit.

Now the Edwards Law Firm has asked us to work with them and we will be forwarding all our mail concerning hepatitis C to them. So if you have hep-C, have not been treated and would like to be included in the lawsuit just send TIFA a letter at PO Box 300220, Austin, Tx, 78703.

From the Chronicle article: "A federal lawsuit filed Thursday says the Texas prison system is 'callously' denying thousands of inmates access to a costly hepatitis C medicine that is widely considered the standard of care, potentially exposing them to liver damage and other health complications. At least 18,000 inmates in the state's 104 facilities have been diagnosed with the chronic virus. And up to 30 percent of Texas's roughly 148,000 inmates may be infected - a similar rate to prisons across the nation. The standard of care for hepatitis

C is Direct-Acting Antiviral medication, or DAA, a course of pills known to cure more than 90 percent of patients. Yet the lawsuit alleges that the prison health care system prescribes the drug only to patients who already have liver damage.

Failure to treat incarcerated patients as well as their peers in the outside world amounts to "cruel and unusual punishment," and deliberate indifference to a serious medical need. The policy violates the Eighth Amendment and the Americans with Disabilities Act, according to the class-action lawsuit filed in Corpus Christi." These are the reasons you can use to file your Step 1 & 2 grievances. ■



### TIFA MAIL

To those of you who have written TIFA a letter during Sept or Oct we owe you a huge apology. Due to staff turnover we do not know which letters were answered and which were not answered. We have heard from some of you again stating your letter was not answered. For that we apologize.

We want you to know that all your mail has been read and scanned into our system. We believe we have replied to all mail from Nov and we are almost finished with Dec. After the newsletter it will be all hands on deck with the January mail.

You are all so important to us and getting you the information you need is a priority. If you have written us during Sept or Oct and have not received a reply, please write us again. **And please remember we cannot help with legal issues. ■**

## What TIFA Means To Us

By LaKeidru Blaylock & Maurie Spooner-Grant

As I ponder over what TIFA means to me, I quickly came to realize that TIFA for me has been a lifeline on many days when I thought all I wanted to do was throw in the towel or a reminder that "you are not alone" when it felt as though I was traveling this journey in a world full of people only to hear my own thoughts.

TIFA has meant a phone call to the Executive Director Jennifer Erschabek, just to hear her say, "you are ok, it's going to be ok, we will figure it out."

TIFA is much more than a support group, it is a platform that has allowed me to gather with other people just like me, who understand my plight and discuss the hardship that you sometimes endure, mentally, emotionally and spiritually, when supporting your incarcerated love one.

But most of all, TIFA is a reminder that all is not lost, that I am not alone, that my voice will be heard and that I can make it

another day. Our monthly meetings serve as a safe place to be transparent and authentic.

If I had to describe TIFA for me in one word, it would be HOPE!! Hope that gives me strength to make it another day, another day that I will have an opportunity to be heard, be seen and fight.

Thank you TIFA for not only what you have done for me, but what you continue to do for countless families through the tireless and selfless work that the staff puts in. TIFA FOR ME means, a voice that will never go silent.

**Your Chapter Chair – LaKeidru Blaylock – Houston, TX**

For me the answer is two-fold; It's care and compassion for those that may not have a solid support system. Not everyone can go to their family or friends or even coworkers and talk about the fact that they have a loved one that is incarcerated.

Often times our chapter meetings turn into venting sessions for those that simply need a release. They need a safe space to talk about their sadness, their grief and their fear, especially when their loved one is entering TDCJ for the very first time.

It's also important for those that are incarcerated to know that although they may feel voiceless, they have a voice. We are out here advocating on their behalf.

As a society we tend to throw people away when they go to prison. So it is important for them to know that those of us at TIFA are advocating for them, that we care and that they MATTER.

**Your Chapter Co-Chair – Maurie Spooner-Grant – Houston, TX**

In an effort to increase member engagement we would like to hear from you! YES YOU!.

And for our TIFA family behind the walls we would love for you to engage too. Write to us and tell us what TIFA means to you.

Your Houston Chapter Chairs ♥



## A Few Phone Notes:

By Jennifer Erschabek

**T**DCJ is currently in the process of doing a refresh of the phones over the next three years and replacing the current phones with stainless steel phones.

TDCJ is also monitoring phone usage during the peak phone usage hours of 5-10 pm. They do have a couple of units with pods that are over the threshold regarding the number of calls during the peak hours and will be installing

additional phones in those pods. If TDCJ OTS receives a call or email from a family member that an inmate cannot get to the phones because of the wait TDCJ will look at the usage and if it is over the threshold will recommend adding additional phones.

If an inmate is having a problem with a phone or a phone is broken, they need to turn in a pink slip with the following information: the issue, unit, the number on the phone and the wing or dorm location. These forms will be delivered to the mailroom where it is scanned and sent to Securus Tech Support.

If a family member needs to assist with getting an issue resolved with a TDCJ phone that is not working correctly, they can reach the OTS Manager at the email address below. Be sure to include the issue, unit, the number on the phone and the wing or dorm location.

Texas Department of Criminal Justice  
Information Technology Division  
OTS Contract Manager  
PO Box 4016  
Huntsville, TX 77342-4016  
E-mail: [offenderphones@tdcj.texas.gov](mailto:offenderphones@tdcj.texas.gov) ■

## TDCJ Has Approved Pre-Paid Cellphones

**B**eginning February 2020, family and friends can register a pre-paid cellphone. You will be able to register a landline, a post-paid cellphone, a pre-paid cellphone, or any combination of the three. Your phone(s) must be registered prior to an offender being allowed to call you. To register your phone, you must access the Enrollment Center website: [www.texasprisonphone.com](http://www.texasprisonphone.com).

• **Registering post-paid cellphone or landline phone:** you will need to upload a copy of your phone bill that includes your name and billing address, telephone #, bill date and company logo.

• **Registering pre-paid cellphone:** you will need to upload a copy of your phone bill that includes your name and billing address, telephone #, bill date and company logo. If you do not receive a phone bill from your prepaid provider, you will need to send a screenshot from your online account that shows your name and billing address, telephone #, date and company logo.

### Specifics for all phone registrations:

1. The name on your driver's license must match the name on your telephone service bill/listing
2. You must agree to the following conditions:
  - You are the registered owner of the phone that will receive calls from the offender
  - You will allow offender calls to this phone
  - You are at least 18 years old
  - You will not forward calls, make 3-way calls or use a speakerphone on calls received from the offender
  - You understand that eligible offenders are not allowed to speak to any adult that is not listed on their Approved Calling list
3. If you don't possess a Texas Driver's License or State ID, you will be asked to upload a photo or photocopy of your out-of-state driver's license.
4. If you have a cellphone, you will be asked to upload a legible copy of your last cell phone bill that shows:
  - Cell Phone Number
  - Customer Name
  - Cell Phone Company Logo
  - Billing Address (Note: Usually on the first 2 pages)
  - Monthly Basic Phone Charge (Note: This is usually on the Account Summary Page)(If you are registering a pre-paid cell phone and you do not receive a phone bill from your prepaid provider, you will need to send a screenshot from your online account that shows your name and billing address, telephone #, date and company logo.)

### The following rules apply to offender calls:

- Phones are available from 7:00 AM - 10:00 PM, unless conditions dictate a change
- Calls are limited to 30 minutes
- You will hear a warning message one minute before being disconnected
- Offenders have unlimited minutes per month
- All calls, except to the Attorney of Record, are subject to monitoring, recording and voice recognition to complete call
- Calls may only be made to home landline telephones. Numbers or cellphones within the continental United States, Hawaii and Alaska.
  - No calls are allowed to 800 numbers, pay phones, international numbers, or virtual numbers like Magic Jack, Vonage, Ooma and Lingo

More information is available at: [www.texasprisonphone.com/faqs\\_general](http://www.texasprisonphone.com/faqs_general)



## SUPPORT TIFA WHEN SHOPPING!

As you do your on-line shopping, remember Amazon donates 0.5% of the price of your eligible AmazonSmile purchases to TIFA if you select us as your charity.



AmazonSmile is the same Amazon you know. Same products, same prices, same service. So use the easiest way to support TIFA and start shopping at <https://smile.amazon.com/>.

Another easy way to donate to TIFA is through Facebook. When your birthday is coming up, Facebook will invite you to create a fundraiser. You can select TIFA as your nominated charity. You then select how much you would like to raise and how long you would like your fundraiser to run. Facebook transfers all donations to the charities and does not charge a fee. Every donation, small or large makes a positive difference!

-- Thank you and Happy Birthday! --



Parole Approvals 2019			
Month/Year	Cases Considered	Cases Approved	Percent
Jan-2019	6,336	2,309	36%
Feb-2019	6,530	2,273	35%
Mar-2019	6,382	2,222	35%
Apr-2019	7,068	2,453	35%
May-2019	6,772	2,459	36%
Jun-2019	6,642	2,491	38%
Jul-2019	6,194	2,482	40%
Aug-2019	6,702	2,668	40%
Sep-2019	6,378	2,660	42%
Oct-2019	6,554	2,540	39%
Nov-2019	6,491	2,610	40%
Dec-2019	5,193	1,957	38%
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>77,242</b>	<b>29,12</b>	<b>38%</b>

These parole numbers include all cases reviewed including cases that have previously been denied a number of times. Source: LBB monthly report.

# Writing a Parole Support Letter

Lately we have been getting several requests from people who would like to know what to put in a parole support letter. If you cannot attend one of our parole packet workshops you can still send in letters of support for someone coming up for parole review. Below is some information that you may find helpful.

The “parole packet” is a collection of information submitted to the Board of Pardons and Paroles by you in support of a parole release. Your loved one does not need to make, nor have made, a “parole packet” to obtain a favorable board vote. And more is not always better. (If you are incarcerated and do not have family support, just do a packet that contains a presentation on how you plan to be successful and your future plans.)

What a parole packet can be is a positive argument about how your loved one has changed so the bad behaviors in the past will not happen again. If he was young and immature how has he learned to make better decisions. If he was not previously focused in school how he has now earned a GED or college credit. If alcohol or drugs were a problem what kind of programs has he attended to help with the problem and how will he continue his sobriety. The packet should demonstrate and talk about what is good in his life.

### THE LETTERS OF SUPPORT -

Individuals who are incarcerated in the Texas prison system are encouraged by the Board of Pardons and Paroles to provide evidence of support for their release on parole. One way to do this is through letters supporting their release. The information below is provided for those who have questions about such letters.

### SUPPORT LETTERS FOR THE PAROLE FILE -

There are no rules for support letters or how many. Just a few good ones that cover the support areas would be good. These are only guidelines and suggestions. You must use what fits your own special situation. Do not be afraid to ask people to write letters. Many people care and want to help. And your request for help may give them a better understanding of the correctional process.

### WHAT IS A LETTER OF SUPPORT? -

Letters of support are evidence that your loved one has a network of friends and family to help when he is released. A parole letter tells the parole board that somebody knows and cares about him, that he has free world input while in prison and someone will help when he gets out. The parole letter is also an opportunity to talk about your loved one’s good attributes and thus offset the bad things that appear in his criminal record.

### WHO WRITES SUPPORT LETTERS? -

A packet needs a few clear and concise letters stating the nature of support –financial, vocational, residential, etc. from family members, close friends and loved ones, relatives, aunts, uncles, and grandparents who will be providing the support. (If you are incarcerated and don’t have family support you can get letters from others sources such as respected members of the community, a mentor, school teachers, religious teachers, students, counselors, etc.) And remember, a letter from a prospective employer can be a very valuable letter.

### HOW MANY SUPPORT LETTERS? -

At the time of the parole interview, three to ten support letters should be enough.

Remember, more is not better. Friends and family can send individual letters to the parole board or you can put them into the parole packet and send it all at once. Letters that arrive at the Austin office AFTER the file has been pulled and electronically forwarded to the IPO will be scanned and also forwarded to the appropriate location. And information such as letters and certificates can always be given to the IPO during the IPO interview.

There are several general areas of information to be included in support letters that someone might write for someone anticipating parole. Support letter writers need to:

1. State their name, age and occupation. If they have been on the current job for a number of years, state the number of years they have been similarly employed.
2. State their relationship and the number of years they have known your loved one.



3. Their belief that, despite your loved one's mistake, they are a good person and the reason they feel this way.

4. Their belief that your loved one will be a useful and law abiding citizen if given the opportunity. They may describe improvements in their attitude, behavior, or efforts they have made to improve themselves. If they will provide housing, give the address and a phone number. They can mention other kinds of help they can provide, for instance, clothing or transportation.

Other people (besides family and friends) who will write a support letter may include the same type of information. If they are willing to help in some way, they may include that in the letter. Some people are willing to help, but don't have money or a job to offer. They can offer to spend time with your loved one doing something positive and worthwhile, or they can offer advice and encouragement. This kind of help is also necessary for someone just released from prison.

### SUGGESTED FORMAT FOR SUPPORT LETTERS FROM FAMILY AND FRIENDS

Parole Board Member  
Board of Pardons and Paroles  
P.O. Box 13401  
Capitol Station  
Austin, Texas 78711

Re: Name TDCJ #  
Name of Unit  
City, Texas, zip

Dear Parole Board Member,

In the first paragraph, the writer should state their name, age, and occupation. State their relationship with your loved one (e.g. friend, relative, teacher, employer, co-worker, etc.). If they have been on the same job for a number of years, state the number of years they have been similarly employed or anything that will demonstrate stability or good character.

In the second paragraph, describe why they believe, in their opinion, your loved one deserves the chance for parole. Tell

about improvements he/she has made since being incarcerated such as education and treatment programs. Discuss your loved one's positive attitude and feelings of responsibility and remorse.

In the third paragraph the writer can talk about their willingness to be supportive and how, e.g. if they will provide housing, give address and phone number if they have one, transportation, job offer. Other people who are willing to help, but don't have money or a job to offer, can be supportive and offer advice and encouragement.

In the last paragraph the writer can recommend that the parole board grant parole and thank them for their consideration.

Sincerely,  
Your name & Contact Information

The SCFO Legal Handbook, CHAPTER 7 - PAROLE & MANDATORY SUPERVISION located in the unit Law Library has more information on parole packets. Good luck with your parole review. ■

# TIFA 2020 Parole Packet Workshops

By Sharon McKinney

We had a great turnout at the Lufkin/Nacogdoches Parole Packet Workshop in January. More than 35 people attended the workshop. It was a great group with a lot of good questions.

TIFA will have 4 more Parole Workshops this year:

- March 21 - New Braunfels
- April 25 - Houston
- June 30th - Webinar
- September 26 - Dallas/Plano

I teach these workshops for you so you will know how the parole process works and how to assemble your own packet. You do not have to pay an attorney to put an excellent packet together.

My story is that I spent 7 years in TDCJ. I faced the parole process 6 times. I know the stress of parole from the inside and I know it from the outside. I know what the Board is looking for from my experience

of working with attorneys who handled parole cases. Two days after my release I began working on a Capital Murder case as the Mitigation Specialist that resulted in a hung jury and eventual dismissal. Jim Skelton was my law mentor and we began doing parole together. And my story goes on from there which you will hear in my Workshop.

So in short, I am not an attorney. I am on Staff with TIFA as the Director of Programs and it is a job I have wanted for years and I absolutely LOVE!

At the workshop I will show you packets I have done, what worked for us and what didn't work for us. So get yourself signed up and let's get your loved one home!

<https://tifa.org/workshops-and-events#!/calendar> ■



The Lufkin/Nacogdoches workshop.

**At these workshops TIFA will provide a workbook that includes information on:**

- Good Time, Work Time, and Flat Time
- Parole and Mandatory Supervision Eligibility Timeframes
- The Parole Timeline
- The Risk Assessment Instrument and the Offender Severity Class
- Voting Options
- Parole Board and Prison Units
- Contact Information
- Helpful Phone Numbers and Websites
- A Sample Parole Packet



## ? What's Happening With the Denture Program ?

**U**TMB and TDCJ established a pilot program at the Goree Unit where inmates can be assessed and given their 3D dentures.

In order to qualify, you must have been incarcerated for at least 12 months to be eligible. Diabetics were given priority and those with special needs were put in line by the date their I-60 was received. Those with no upper or lower teeth are considered special needs. If teeth need to be pulled for total removal you must heal for 6 months before you can begin the denture process.

You must submit an I-60 to dental to get on the list. Inmates will be housed at the Goree Unit while this process is completed.

TIFA inquired about the 'wait' list for dentures and was told there was no wait list. We also asked if medical could supply denture cream for indigent inmates who could not afford it. We were told that these dentures did not need denture cream.

TIFA is now working with Rep. Wu to help people with denture issues. If you need help with dentures or denture cream please write us at TIFA, PO Box 300220, Austin, Tx. 78703. We will forward your letter to Rep. Wu. ■

## Advocacy for Earned Time Credit & Oversight

**T**IFA will again work with legislatures to sponsor the Independent Oversight and Earned Time Credit bills during the 2021 session. We need your support. Help us amplify our voice by signing the petitions and urging people to support these issues.

**Independent Oversight Petition-** The need to spot and stop systemic abuse, corruption and toxic environments continues to be critically important.

**Earned Time Credit Petition-** In 2020 It's Time for Common Sense and Earned Time Credit! Mercy and common sense must be a partner to justice. Excessive,

lengthy sentences for individuals who have committed crimes, both violent and non-violent are costly, counterproductive, and inhumane.

When you sign the petitions, we'll let you know when it's time to take action, with a reminder of your representatives and how to contact them. You can find the petitions on the TIFA website [www.tifa.org](http://www.tifa.org), or on our FaceBook pages.

**Advocacy Teams-** TIFA is preparing advocacy trainings to help everyone stay engaged with the legislative process throughout the interim. If you're interested in receiving more training and taking on more tasks for justice advocacy you can join us!

Our next Team phone call will be on February 19th. If you would like to be a part of our Team email [sharon.mckinney@tifa.org](mailto:sharon.mckinney@tifa.org) ■



## Call for Literature from Inside the Walls

Joe Lockard  
- Arizona State University,  
English Faculty Member

**A**re you a **WRITER**? Here is a chance to submit an abstract. If you are currently incarcerated and wish to submit an abstract there is a very short deadline. But anything we receive in February we will forward to Professor Lockard.

Please send the 250-300 word abstract to TIFA, PO Box 300220, Austin, TX 78703 and write **PRISON VOICES** on the outside of the envelope. We will scan the abstract and send it off as soon as we get it.

**MLA\* 2021/Toronto, January 7-10: CFP -- Prison Voices: Literature from Inside the Walls**

This panel will examine modern literary production emerging from US prisons since the post-Attica prison-building boom and the growth of mass incarceration. It will center incarcerated voices, their ideologies, and pedagogical possibilities for college and university teachers. There is special interest in discussion of censorship and conditions of production. Scope includes single or multiple authors,

ex-prisoners and currently incarcerated, and all genres – poetry, fiction, non-fiction prose, autobiography, drama, and more. Send 250-300 word abstracts and a short bio to [Joe.Lockard@asu.edu](mailto:Joe.Lockard@asu.edu) before **February 25, 2020.** ■

\*MLA-Modern Language Association

## Ask The Attorney - Answers to Your Civil Law Questions



Attorney Robyn Harlin

**A**ttorney Robyn Harlin was the host of our first "Ask the Attorney" webinar. This webinar focused on civil matters that could affect those incarcerated and their families. We hope to have more of these webinars in the future and to include a session on criminal law also. Robyn Harlin has been practicing law since 1997. Born and raised in West Texas and spending her career in the greater Houston area, she exemplifies the deeply held values of a true Texan. She works with passion, hard work and integrity to make sure that her clients receive the best outcome possible. Robyn has extensive experience dealing with families in crisis and takes a commonsense approach to resolving their issues.

### 1. WHAT IS A DURABLE POWER OF ATTORNEY (POA)?

A Statutory Durable Power of Attorney allows a person to grant powers to an agent "agent in fact" to perform important functions such as financial transactions, business or other legal matters to name a few.

### 2. DO YOU NEED A POA FOR FINANCIAL ISSUES?

It is advantageous to execute a Statutory Durable Power of Attorney for financial transactions as long as the person you appoint as agent is trustworthy and would act in your best interest. If they fail to do so, severe criminal consequences could result.

### 3. WHAT IS A MEDICAL POWER OF ATTORNEY?

A Medical Power of Attorney is a legal document that authorizes someone you trust to make medical decisions on your behalf if you are unable to do so or you are incapacitated.

#### **4. WHAT IS THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN A DURABLE POWER OF ATTORNEY FOR HEALTH CARE AND A MEDICAL POWER OF ATTORNEY?**

This is a misnomer. There is no such thing as a Statutory Durable Power of Attorney for Health Care. A Health Care Power of Attorney is a legal document that allows an individual to designate another person to make medical decisions for him or her when he or she cannot make decisions for themselves.

#### **5. DOES A PERSON NEED BOTH A MEDICAL POWER OF ATTORNEY AND A STATUTORY DURABLE POWER OF ATTORNEY?**

Yes it is good to have both a Health Care Power of Attorney and a Statutory Durable Power of Attorney.

#### **6. IS THERE A POWER OF ATTORNEY THAT COVERS IT ALL?**

No. You need both a Health Care Power of Attorney and a Statutory Durable Power of Attorney.

#### **7. WHAT IS A LIVING WILL?**

A Texas living will is also referred to as a directive. A Texas living will is used to document your wishes related to medical care. Healthcare providers will consult a Texas living will if you are unable to make your own medical decisions. A Texas living will must be signed by witnesses or be notarized.

#### **8. DOES ONE ALSO NEED A DIRECTIVE?**

An advance directive is a set of instructions someone prepares in advance of ill health that determines their healthcare wishes. A living will is one type of advance directive that becomes effective when a person is terminally ill.

#### **9. WHAT DOES THE ATTORNEY GENERAL PROVIDE REGARDING CHILD SUPPORT?**

- Basic information about your case
- The terms of your order (such as

monthly child support payments and total arrears owed)

- A review of your case to see if you are eligible for a child support modification (upon your request)
- The address and phone number of the child support office handling your case
- Information on how to establish paternity for your child if you weren't married to the other parent when the child was born
- The state of Texas child support guidelines (how the child support amount is calculated by state law)

#### **10. WHAT THE ATTORNEY GENERAL CANNOT DO FOR YOU.**

- Change custody or enforce visitation
- File a Termination of Parental Rights petition
- Give you the address of your children or the other parent
- Perform DNA testing if you sign an Acknowledgment of Paternity (AOP), or if there is an existing child support order
- Answer questions other than child support inquiries
- Obtain information from the court if you do not have a case with the OAG

#### **11. WHAT SHOULD I DO IF I HAVE A CHILD SUPPORT CASE WHEN I ENTER PRISON?**

If you have a child support case when you enter prison you need to provide the office that is handling your case your current address. By doing this you will receive monthly statements showing how much you have paid and how much you owe in past due support. Remember if you are able to send in some of your child support payments send payments through the State Disbursement Unit. Payments given directly to the other parent is not automatically credited to your child support case and courts may consider direct payments as "gifts."

#### **12. IF I AM IN PRISON, I CANNOT WORK. WHY DOESN'T MY CHILD SUPPORT ORDER CHANGE AUTOMATICALLY?**

The Office of the Attorney General (OAG) cannot change your child support. Only the court that has jurisdiction in your case can change the amount you are required to pay. The court will only consider changing the amount after the proper legal papers have been filed.

#### **13. HOW CAN MY CHILD SUPPORT**

#### **ORDER BE CHANGED?**

Child support can only be changed through a court order. You can complete the OAG's Incarcerated Noncustodial Parent Affidavit of Income/Assets form and return it to the OAG office. This form can be obtained by writing the OAG or your unit law library. Completing this form does not guarantee that your child support will change, but it could get your case in front of a judge who will make that decision. You can also hire an attorney to file the papers with the court for you.

Remember the amount you owe does not change until the court makes a ruling. Also, interest is added to child support that goes unpaid while you are in prison. Interest on unpaid child support accrues at 6 percent annually, even during incarceration. Arrears remain in place until paid in full.

#### **14. WHERE CAN I GET HELP WITH MY CHILD SUPPORT OR INFORMATION ABOUT MY CHILD SUPPORT CASE?**

The law library can give you the "Child Support Inquiry Form for Incarcerated Parents." All requests for information about child support or your child support case must be made on this form. Please allow 60 – 90 days for a response from the OAG.

#### **15. IF I REMARRY IS MY SPOUSE'S INCOME COUNTED WHEN MY CHILD SUPPORT AMOUNT IS CALCULATED?**

No. Your spouse's income will not be added to your net resources when calculating the amount of child support to be paid. Child support cannot be taken out of your spouse's check or earnings.

#### **16. WHAT ARE GRANDPARENT'S RIGHTS?**

Under Texas law, grandparent visitation rights are well established. A grandparent can petition the court to establish visitation rights with a grandchild or to modify an existing visitation order. Before a judge will award visitation privileges, the grandparent must prove that visitation is in the child's best interests.

Contact Information  
Office of the Attorney General  
Child Support Division  
P. O. Box 12017  
Austin, Texas 78711-2017 ■





## Texas Inmate Families Association

Strengthening families through support, education, and advocacy

TIFA  
P.O. Box 300220  
Austin, TX 78703-0004

**CONTACT**  
**Vol.25 No. 1 Jan. 2020**

## TIFA Chapters

- Amarillo**  
3rd Friday, 6:30 pm  
Petro Truckstop Meeting Rm 8500  
E I-40  
Amarillo, TX 79118  
(806) 420-1684
- Arlington**  
2nd Tuesday, 6:30 pm  
George W. Hawes Library  
100 South Center St  
Arlington, TX 76010  
(817) 721-1398
- Austin- Central**  
2nd Monday, 7:00 pm  
AGE Center  
3710 Cedar Street  
Austin, TX 78703  
(512) 775-1797
- Beaumont**  
1st Tuesday, 6:30 pm  
St. Jude Thaddeus Catholic  
Church Family Life Center  
6825 Gladys  
Beaumont, TX 77726  
(409) 617-8395
- Bryan/College Station**  
1st Tuesday, 6:00 pm  
Friends Congregational Church  
2200 Southwood Dr.  
Bryan, TX 77845  
(832) 608-3371
- 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**  
2nd Tuesday, 6:30 pm  
Prairie Creek Baptist Church  
3201 W 15th  
Plano, TX 75075  
(469) 826-7893
- El Paso**  
3rd Tuesday, 7:00 pm MST  
Mount Hope Lutheran Church  
9640 Montwood Dr.  
El Paso, TX 79925  
(512) 371-0900
- Ft. Worth**  
2nd 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  
United Way of Greater Houston  
50 Waugh Drive  
Houston, TX 77007  
(713) 261-0638
- Humble**  
2nd Thursday, 6:30 pm  
Cathedral of Praise Assembly of God  
11303 C.E. King Parkway  
Houston, TX 77044  
(281) 224-2002
- Karnes County**  
2nd Thursday, 6:30 pm  
First Baptist Kenedy  
209 E School Road  
Kenedy, TX 78119
- Lufkin/Nacogdoches**  
2nd Tuesday, 6:30 pm  
First Baptist Church  
411 North Street  
Nacogdoches, TX 75961  
(936) 635-4010
- McAllen**  
3rd Tuesday, 6:00 pm  
Edinburg Municipal Park  
Edinburg, TX 78542  
(956) 570-2391
- New Braunfels**  
1st Thursday, 7:00 pm  
Peace Lutheran Church-Cafe  
1147 South Walnut  
New Braunfels, TX 78132  
(830) 237-2679
- Paris**  
3rd Tuesday 6:30 pm  
Calvary Chapel Church  
3100 Clarksville St.  
Paris, TX 75460  
(903) 407-0984
- Pearland - South Houston**  
3rd Tuesday, 6:30 pm (exc Nov & Dec)  
Manvel Bible Chapel  
4230 FM 1128  
Pearland, TX 77584  
(281) 300-7275
- San Angelo**  
2nd Thursday, 6:00 pm  
Immanuel Baptist Church  
90 E 14th St  
San Angelo, TX 76903  
(512) 371-0900
- San Antonio**  
2nd Wednesday, 7:00 pm  
TriPoint- A Center for Life  
3233 North St Mary's Street  
San Antonio, TX 78232  
(210) 872-5087
- Tyler**  
2nd Thursday, 6:30 pm  
Freedom Fellowship  
2915 SSE Loop 323  
Tyler, TX 75701  
(903) 504-9771
- Virtual Chapter**  
(Zoom Meeting)  
2nd Wednesday, 7:00 pm  
(409) 789-7376
- Waco**  
3rd Thursday, 6:30 pm  
Waco Hispanic Chamber of Commerce  
915 La Salle Ave  
Waco, TX 76706

Check our website calendar at [www.tifa.org](http://www.tifa.org); times and locations are subject to change.

Also look for new TIFA Chapters starting near you.

If you are interested in starting a TIFA chapter in your area, please contact the TIFA office at (512) 371-0900 or send an email to [tifa@tifa.org](mailto:tifa@tifa.org)