



# TPCA Newsletter



March 2022  
Vol. 2

## Note from TPCA President

We are glad to get going in the new year. However, it is not without its challenges. Our few but mighty TPCA volunteers are developing training for affected family members, creating resource documents, communicating with officials, developing new and creative ways to get your voices heard, gearing up for Beat the heat events with our Heated Mock cell and other events that bring awareness to the public community, all while still dealing with their daily struggles and COVID. While in my hospital bed I was constantly thinking about how bad it must be to have had COVID while behind those walls. That constant thought had me sharing, and now there are several hospital staff that know about the extreme temperatures and other inhumane issues. My heart and thoughts are with you. With all of these challenges, admittedly we have been slow to respond to some of your letters. We read all of your mail and use it to inform us as to the best way to proceed. Just know that sometimes you may get the advocacy before the response.

Blessings!  
*Amite Dominick, PhD*  
TPCA President

### How can I make a donation?

TPCA operates solely on volunteered time and donations. This means we need everyone's help to purchase stamps and printing supplies. So, please consider donating!

You can send donations or stamps to :

TPCA  
P.O. Box 1974  
Fulton, TX 78358

Or tell your family members about our donation button on the website at [www.TPCAdvocates.org](http://www.TPCAdvocates.org)



## Political News

Interim Charges-Just because ALL 2021 sessions are over doesn't mean the work has ended. Between sessions is one of the best times for your family members to connect with political officials who spend most of their time in their district offices. The time in between sessions is called "Interim." During the interim, committees often take up various topics to investigate more thoroughly. TPCA & TIFA have created a list of charges for the convenience of our political officials and have been working with them, encouraging them to submit these charges to specific committees for consideration. The decision to take up these charges is still up to the Lt. Governor and Speaker of the house. The following is our list of charges.

1. Extreme Temperatures
2. Medical Care
3. MRIS/Compassionate release program
4. Toxic water
5. Solitary Confinement
6. Substandard food
7. Independent Oversight

Unfortunately, the speaker of the house did not assign these charges as hoped. However, he did create a new House Interim Study Committee on Criminal Justice Reform with the following committee members:

- Representative Jeff Leach, Chair
- Representative Joe Moody, Vice-Chair
- Representative Rhetta Bowers
- Representative Brad Buckley
- Representative Angie Chen Button
- Representative David Cook
- Representative Cole Hefner
- Representative Eddie Morales
- Representative Reggie Smith
- Representative Senfronia Thompson
- Brett Tolman, Public Member

Please write these individuals to make your concerns known. Also, ask your family members to visit, email, and call them. (TPCA mailing list of Political officials available upon request.

## Announcement

TPCA is pleased to introduce to you our new Vice President of Support for Affected Families & Incarcerated. Please welcome, **Kathy Dunbar!** Kathy has been working with TPCA since 2020 In the Social Media department and in her new role will be working with Tatiana Sontollo (Campos) and the other Family Mediators. Her responsibilities include developing curriculum and training for affected families, helping develop resources for you, and working with the family mediators to respond to your letters. She is also TPCA's liaison with TDCJ. We are excited that she has agreed to take on this role and know that she will be effective In helping you and your families. To contact Kathy write to her at our P.O. Box or, email her at [kaitlindunbar@hotmail.com](mailto:kaitlindunbar@hotmail.com)

## Family Mediators

Our Family Mediators have been hard at work. Since the last publication, we have had some changes and vacancies that you should be aware of. The following list is by region and email addresses have been included so that you can Inform your family members. You can continue to reach TPCA and all of the mediators by writing us.

**Director: Tatiana Sontollo (Campos)**  
[tatiana.campostpca@gmail.com](mailto:tatiana.campostpca@gmail.com)

**Region 1: Melissa Riana**  
[Melissarianatpca@gmail.com](mailto:Melissarianatpca@gmail.com)

**Region II: A.J. Robinson- Tentative**

**Region III: Vacant**

**Region IV: Courtney Schisser**  
[Courtneytpca@gmail.com](mailto:Courtneytpca@gmail.com)

**Region V: Patrick Capps**

**Region VI: Kelly Riley**  
[KellyrileyTPCA@gmail.com](mailto:KellyrileyTPCA@gmail.com)

**Irish Blessing**

As you slide down  
the bannister of life,  
may the splinters never  
point the wrong way.

## Organization Showcase



## Organization Showcase Continued



**Send mail to:**  
**The Prison Show c/o**  
**David Collingsworth**  
**226 Chipmunk Trail**  
**Shepherd, Tx. 77371,**  
**Website:**  
**<https://theprisonshow.net/>**

The Prison Show has been a part of the larger Texas Prison community, along with TDCJ, for almost 42 years. The Prison Show airs prison-related issues in order for people to understand what really happens in Texas prisons and the harsh conditions heaped on inmates. The Prison Show and many advocacy groups across Texas are doing their jobs, trying to keep TDCJ honest and improving. The prison show airs every Friday evening, 9 -10 pm News/advocacy (10:00 pm "shout-outs) central time. Houston's KPFT 90.1 FM Host, Hank Lamb

## Reflection From Behind the Walls -Op-Ed from the Inside

### WHO CAN MAKE PRISON REFORM HAPPEN?

Misael Santollo (Incarcerated Individual)

Prison Reform is a hot topic right now. There are many people in support of it, and many people are opposed to it. So who decides which laws get passed?

#### Democracy

Let's examine our form of government. Democracy is a government in which the supreme power of governance lies in the hands of its citizens. Also, the government's power derives from the consent of the people, and this consent, in turn, implies majority rule. Voting is our tool to ensure that "we the people" are represented proportionally. But what happens when we don't vote? Imagine a group of 30 people sitting in a day room. The movie is over, and one person gets up to do a channel check, majority vote rules. Of the 30 people, let's say only 10 vote for a particular show. What happens next is that all 30 people get stuck watching the show whether they voted or not. Though only 10 voted, the process was fair. The other twenty people, by default, agreed to whatever outcome. This defaulted outcome is exactly what happens when we talk about Prison Reform. We imply we are OK with the status quo by not encouraging our loved ones to vote in local elections. And so, when the system doesn't change the way we want it to, we get upset and even discouraged. We need to understand the power of the vote. If the vote did not have power, voter suppression laws and tactics would not exist. Think about that for a minute.

#### A Collective of Individuals

Groups like Texas prisons community advocates (TPCA), TIFA, Faith, Epicenter, etc., are the active platforms where we, as stakeholders in the fight for Prison Reform, come together. Each of these politically active groups focuses on specific issues that they would like to change. They gather, analyze, organize and present important information that will promote their goals to lawmakers. These groups also educate and politically socialize all of their members, which is our families and us. When we don't know who our representatives or senators are or how to find them, these groups point us in the right direction. When we don't know who our families should vote for, these groups provide guidance about which officials will work for our interests and which ones won't. Our membership activism through these groups shows officials that we know who they are. More importantly, we know when they come up for reelection and will need our collective votes. This is where we stop ten people from deciding what 30 will watch. This is where our families and we become involved, really involved, and a true majority rule exists.

#### Voter Disenfranchisement

Remember I mentioned voter suppression laws earlier? Texas has a few voter laws that suppress, discourage, and prohibit certain people from voting. Prisoners and parolees are prohibited from voting. Though our vote no longer exists, we all have family and friends who can vote. They will vote on Our behalf. The Prison Reform advocacy groups and their members will do their part, but you need to do yours. Going back to our question, "who can make Prison Reform happen?" I say most voters, lawmakers, and advocacy groups work together. If you or your household have never voted, have never contacted officials, or have never been active with advocacy groups, you may want to seriously reconsider your current strategy of whining, blaming, and pessimism if you want to help make Prison Reform happen.

**Opinions expressed in this publication are those of the author(s) and do not necessarily represent the policies of TPCA**

TPCA would like to connect you with organizations working for you and inform you about what they do to help advocate on your behalf.

**VoGue-Texas Voters Guide** is a coalition of 7 advocacy organizations that have created a voters guide for criminal justice reform. They started by creating a survey to find out from affected families what type of criminal justice reform is the most important. Next, they sent questionnaires to all of the new candidates for the Texas House of Representatives and for the Senate to find out where they stood on these issues. Please let your families know to visit <https://voguetexasvoterguideforjustic.godaddysites.com/> To find out what the candidates said before heading to the polls.

 **Our partners at TIFA would like you to know about their re-entry program.**

TIFA is currently working on a reentry program for all system impacted people. We have an Inside Workbook that will give you tips on those first few weeks home. We also have a workshop once you are home that covers numerous topics.

If your family would like to join our monthly reentry Zoom they can join the Facebook group TIFA: Reentry and Support, held the 3rd Thursday of the month at 6:30 pm.

Sharon McKinney TIFA Executive Director

Our mission is to break the cycle of crime by strengthening families through support, education, and advocacy. TIFA also provides parole workshops as well as online resources for our members.

TIFA P.O. Box 300220 Austin TX 78703 [tifa@tifa.org](mailto:tifa@tifa.org)

## Commissary Update

TPCA has been working with the TDCJ Commissary department on getting a program to contribute monies towards fans, cooling towels, and cooling shirts to indigent incarcerated for almost a year now. I was told earlier on that the cooling shirts are definitely a no-go for now. My most recent conversation was with Ron Steffa Chief Financial Officer (2/22/2022). So here's the news....The old TXCURE/ fan project is being done away with. The good news is that TDCJ is moving towards providing fans for the indigent through internal methods. This is still in process so I don't have any firm dates yet.

### Cooling towels

TPCA would like to be able to provide cooling towels for the indigent incarcerated. We had hoped to structure a program much like the old CURE fan project, however, we are still trying to work out the logistical issues with TDCJ.

### Overall Commissary issues

Vendors continue to ask for price increases. Those have to be approved by the comptrollers' office and other departments within TDCJ which may contribute to some delays (Per Ron and Randy). However, the increased cost is being passed on to the incarcerated people and family members so... I asked about an increased spend for ECCOM and alternative methods similar to those used in the states, to be utilized by family members to mail in food items. Ron stated that they are currently exploring options for outside food orders and "He will look into" increased spend amount for ECCOM. Again no dates on either of these, we will continue to follow up. Later both Kathy Dunbar and I spoke with Randy Johnson (2/24/2022) to get more information on a unit level. Overall, Commissary is still having vendor and shipping issues. The majority of the products come from overseas. Why? Because U.S. vendors can't supply the needed demand or have packing problems due to them receiving their packing from overseas. Of particular concern for family members is the lack of protein items on ECCOM. Why? If a unit Commissary(s) is below 30% that item will not be placed on ECCOM. When some item levels get "too low" at a Unit

## HAPPY ST. PATRICK'S DAY

### Commissary Continued

Commissary "spot purchases" are sometimes made for certain items to U.S. vendors. has been the case in recent months. I was told that the Unit commissaries have protein items in stock (mackerel had just made it to the warehouse that day and will need to be distributed to the units, which takes about 2 weeks). We also discussed unit limits and some parts of the unit receiving fewer items due to commissary rotations. The policy sounds good but, it may not be being adhered to at your unit, especially with the current staffing problems. So please let us know if you are running into Commissary issues so that TPCA can track and deal with them.

- **Reminder - these are the items that DON'T go towards your commissary spend** - Over the Counter Medication, Vitamins, Sensodyne Toothpaste, Tampons, Panty Liners/Pads, Hygiene Packs, Registered Property Items, Tennis Shoes, Work Boots, Radio, Hot Pot, Watch, Alarm Clock, Fan, Lamp, Typewriter, Hair Dryer, Storage Box (Females), Religious Medallions, Typewriter Ribbons, Postage Stamps. Emergency Items to include: Chill Towels, Cool Shirts, Gym Shorts, Shower Shoes, Water, Electrolytes, Sunblock, Passover Items

### Help us Help you

- File your I-60's and Grievances. Communicate with your Loved Ones about what you filed and send copies when you can.
- Once you send in your Step 1 grievance then, send in an I-60 to the grievance coordinator.
- Grievance forms and instructions on how to use them are available from staff in each housing area or at the law library. You always need a paper trail to prove that you filed a grievance and to show the response you were given.
- Getting it done is better than not getting it done, in the long run.

**If you would like us to advocate on your behalf, please include grievances or grievance numbers and let us know that we have permission to contact TDCJ on your behalf.**

### TPCA's Mission Statement

*Texas Prisons Community Advocates (TPCA) educates and supports family members, incarcerated individuals and others by connecting them to organizational resources, encouraging awareness, and advocacy for the advancement of humane conditions within the Texas Prisons.*

## Medical Corner

We have heard from you that getting the two-year HIPPA/PHI form has been difficult at some units. **All units should have this form!** The HIPPA/PHI form is valid for 730 (2yrs) as indicated on the form. If the person you communicate at your unit doesn't know what this form is or tells you they don't have the form, here is what you should do. You must put in an I60 to medical, the Practice Manager or Administrative CCA or your family member can request the form be brought to you by calling the Family Hotline (936) 437-4271.

Once you have it, fill it out, send a copy to your loved ones on the outside for their records, then turn it into medical. You can also write the TDCJ Patient Liaison Program at Two Financial Plaza, #625 Huntsville, Texas 77340.

Also, know that you may have to sign an additional HIPPA/PHI form at a hospital for your family members to be able to receive information on your status.

What happens if you don't have a HIPPA/PHI on file? If there is no authorization on file, they will NOT give your family information.

*Your letters help us determine what resources we need to develop to meet your needs. If you have written to us or sent in a heat survey, THANK YOU! If you have further concerns about medical policies, please write us, and we will include clarification in each issue.*

Life was made for living.  
Laugh anytime you can.  
Friendship is made by giving.  
It's all part of the plan.

When we are in our Autumn  
And colors touch our leaves,  
We neednt fear the Winter.  
We have built our memories.

Jim Guevara



Art and poetry feature by an  
Incarcerated Individual

# What Happens to Your Surveys?

My name is Dr. Carlee Purdum. I'm a research professor at

Texas A&M University at the Hazard Reduction and Recovery Center (HRRC).

I began working with Dr. Amite Dominick and the Texas Prisons Community

Advocates in 2019 to help analyze the heat and COVID-19 surveys that incarcerated people

such as yourself have been filling out to better educate the world about what you're experiencing

in Texas prisons. Once a survey is sent to TPCA, they share it with me, and I work with a team of students from

the Aggie Research program to input your responses into a spreadsheet. I then analyze the data and use the

results to write reports. Our first major report, "Extreme Heat and COVID-19 in Texas Prisons," will be published

by the HRRC will be available for anyone to view publicly online through the HRRC and TPCA websites. Thank you

for all that you contribute to these reports. Without you, they would not be possible.



## So, what does TPCA do with these reports?

We show them to everyone. And, I do mean everyone, from community members to politicians, from TV reporters to print reporters. We SHARE SHARE SHARE!! We hope that everyone we talk to about these reports learns the truth.

And that this truth gets as deep inside them as it is in us so that they are motivated to be part of changing these

Inhumane conditions for all

---

## MOURNING OUR LOSSES IS SEEKING MEMORIALS, WRITING, AND ARTWORK

Mourning Our Losses (MOL) was launched by a volunteer group of educators, artists, and organizers committed to the release of those incarcerated nationwide. Today, we continue to grow this platform for grief, healing, community, and reflection for all those affected by the death of a loved one due to poor conditions, medical negligence, violence, and mental health crises inside - the natural byproducts of mass incarceration. We are a team driven by our own prison experiences. Our crowd-sourced memorial site and all that we do depends upon our ties to you, our siblings still inside. Our goal is to inform public, national conversations about the dangers of mass incarceration by

sharing the stories of those lost. In doing this, we let the public know that we are all people - not numbers, criminals, or "inmates." We do not use that type of dehumanizing language in the memorials we post. We do not speak negatively about anyone or talk about the crime for which they were convicted (at all!). No one deserves to suffer at the hands of the prison industry and NO ONE deserves to die inside. You can help us. You may send us a memorial for a loved one who died, related creative writing, photos, and/or artwork (which we may not be able to return safely). When you send it in, be sure to include the name the person went by and your name as you would like it to appear on the memorial (or let us know if you'd like to remain anonymous). Let us know whether or not you give us permission to edit spelling errors, and whether we can contact you via electronic mail (JPay, Securus, GTL, etc.) to follow up. Write to us at:

Mourning Our Losses

c/o Texas After Violence Project

P.O. Box 15005

Austin, TX 78761

We encourage you to share our website, [mourningourlosses.org](http://mourningourlosses.org), with your friends and family on the outside. Memorials can be submitted on our website or via email at [mourningourlosses@gmail.com](mailto:mourningourlosses@gmail.com).

*A life source and a light center*



TEXAS PRISONS COMMUNITY ADVOCATES

P.O. Box 1974 Fulton, TX 78358



Name: \_\_\_\_\_  
 TDCJ Number: \_\_\_\_\_  
 Unit: \_\_\_\_\_  
 Date: \_\_\_\_\_

TPCA has teamed up with Champaign to Fight Toxic Prisons to continue to be voice for everyone on the inside during this pandemic. We are committed to coordinating medical advocacy and material support to those in need and we will continue to look for more ways to put solidarity behind the walls of TDCJ.

Please answer the following questions pertaining to your personal experience with COVID.

1. Are you 65 years old or older?  YES  NO
2. Do you have a chronic/ pre-existing medical condition or a weakened immune system?  YES  NO
3. If yes please describe \_\_\_\_\_
4. Have you or are you currently experiencing any of the following COVID-19 symptoms? Please check all that apply
 

<input type="checkbox"/> Fever	<input type="checkbox"/> Gastrointestinal issues
<input type="checkbox"/> Dry Cough	<input type="checkbox"/> Diarrhea
<input type="checkbox"/> Shortness of breath	<input type="checkbox"/> General Body Aches
6. How long have/did you have the symptoms that you checked above? \_\_\_\_\_  
 \_\_\_\_\_
7. Have you been tested for COVID-19 between Jan 2020 to present date?  YES  NO
8. If so, what were the test results?  Positive  Negative
9. Did you test positive for COVID- 19 Multiple times?  YES  NO If yes, How many times? \_\_\_\_\_
10. How many "lockdowns" "rack ups" did you experience per year? If you were at multiple units please list dates and amount of time there  
 2020 \_\_\_\_\_ Unit(s) name \_\_\_\_\_  
 2021 \_\_\_\_\_ Unit Name(s) \_\_\_\_\_
11. How did the "lockdowns" impact your ability to communicate with your Loved Ones \_\_\_\_\_  
 \_\_\_\_\_
12. Please use this section tell us more about how you were impacted by "lockdowns" \_\_\_\_\_  
 \_\_\_\_\_  
 \_\_\_\_\_

**Prison Conditions**

13. Per TDCJ, flyers are posted in each unit informing everyone of the signs and symptoms related to COVID-19. Is there a sign posted at your unit?  YES  NO
14. TDCJ also states all offenders would be shown a video pertaining to COVID-19. Did you watch a COVID video?  YES  NO
15. Did staff members wear PPE when required? Please describe what PPE was used or not used. \_\_\_\_\_  
 \_\_\_\_\_
16. Is your unit being cleaned and sanitized daily?  YES  NO

Please share any additional information that you would like to share on the back of this page.

Thank you for your continued support. We appreciate each and every one of you. Please stay safe in there!

Your family and friends can also reach TPCA can be reached by email as well [TPCAAdvocates@gmail.com](mailto:TPCAAdvocates@gmail.com) or Champaign to Fight Toxic Prisons by email [fighttoxicprisonsphoneline@gmail.com](mailto:fighttoxicprisonsphoneline@gmail.com) .

Please return survey to

**Texas Prisons Community Advocates (TPCA) P.O. Box 1974, Fulton, TX. 78358**