

Date (Today's Date)

Re: Heat conditions within Texas Prisons

Dear (Representative's name)

I am writing you out of concern for all the men and women incarcerated within the Texas Department of Criminal Justice (TDCJ). I'm certain you know of the extreme heat conditions within the Texas Prison System. Which prompts me to believe you acknowledge the conditions inside these prisons represent "cruel and unusual punishment". Therefore, they violate International Human Rights Standards and the U.S. Constitution.

TDCJ operates 104 prison units, with only 30 being partially air-conditioned. Which means at the 76 less fortunate units, heat indexes inside the units will fluctuate anywhere from 100 to 150 degrees during the summer months. That's unbearable heat! I'm certain a handful of these units provide ice, water, and "respite" areas, but most do not. In fact, some units are instructing the correctional officers to do rectal temperature checks before giving permission to go in the "respite" areas. Other units are retaliating on the offenders who request entry to the "respite" area. Then, some units have no "respite" area at all. Could you imagine having to live like that?

Psychological research shows heat increases hostility, aggression, and violent behaviors. Journalists reporting the implements of heat on these behaviors suggest installing climate controls would diminish aggression-related issues. Plus, installing A/C in the units would increase the safety of both the inmates and the staff. Fights, aggressive acts between inmates and correctional officers would become less recurrent and the overall tension in the units would decline. A safer environment will call for less security, thus would aid understaffed units. Besides, inmates could help with installation to cut down on the initial cost.

I recognize the logic that those incarcerated committed a crime, so they must go through the repercussions. But, it makes little sense to deprive them of air conditioning, in a state as hot as Texas. I'm aware it would be costly to place air conditioning in all Texas prisons. But, no one deserves to lose their life due to their living conditions. Yet, at least 23 inmates have perished due to heat-related issues since 1998. The Texas Commission on Jail standards requires every county jail in Texas to maintain internal Temperatures between 65 and 85 degrees. I'm asking for the same requirements in our Texas prisons.

Six inmates from the Wallace Pack unit sued TDCJ because of these inhumane conditions, and they won. So, I assure you there are many more lawsuits to come. Please do the right thing and provide humane conditions for everyone within the Texas Prison System. Myself, along with hundreds of others will not give up this fight. If it were someone you loved, would you? Thank you for your time and consideration in this matter. I can only hope you do the right thing.

Sincerely,