

Dear Texas Sunset Advisory Committee,

I am a person impacted by family and friends who have been incarcerated. Before I begin, I pray that the committee has allowed for an accessible way for them to share their concerns confidentially.

I want to elevate the concerns below on behalf of my family and friends who are and have been in the custody of TDCJ.

Current Issues:

- **Living Conditions:** Inmates are not provided with basic toiletries and towels. They often must use their undergarments to dry themselves. When placed in a unit they are sometimes given dirty mattresses and rather sleep on the floor. Facilities are also infested with roaches, spiders, and other insects. My foster brother was almost bitten in the head by a spider this morning.
- **A/C and Heating:** It is very inhumane to have inmates without a cooling/heating system. The temperatures have been at record highs that make the climate deadly. I have been checking on my foster brother and he sleeps during the day to forget about the exhausting heat. His unit has had cold temperatures in the 40s recently and the unit only turns on the heater for one of the dorms. The rest of the inmates don't get theirs turned on. This is so inhumane and unacceptable. I stress a lot worrying if my loved ones will survive another day there.
- **Food:** Improper portions of food are given and inmates are losing weight and staying unhealthy. The meals provided are often gross and have no taste. Animals eat better than inmates.
- **Securus:** Family and friend connections are critical in ensuring that inmates have support in place. Securus has been making millions of dollars out of families who often don't have the financial means to make ends meet. Imagine having to pay to send an electronic message or make a phone call to a loved one. There are tons of inmates whose families don't have the means to fund their accounts to be able to write to each other or make phone calls. They go through mental health problems and are abandoned by the world.
- **Visitations:** Inmates are only allowed to visit immediate family members. Some inmates were raised in the foster care system and/or homeless and have no immediate family. Friends and those who are positive supports for inmates aren't allowed to visit. Inmates stay isolated and don't have someone who can help them navigate the prison life. I have not been able to visit my foster brother because Luther Unit hasn't processed his request.

- **Body Cameras:** Some units have body cameras but not all of them do. Often, staff/guards take advantage of inmates because of the power of authority they have. Not having cameras prevents transparency and cover-up by the prison administration. This also creates legal issues for inmates who get wrongly written up and charged.
- **Leadership Visits:** My loved ones have advised how units prep for leadership visits. This is not the proper way to audit a union as it gives the unit leadership enough time to prepare for the perfect visit to avoid trouble.
- **Parole:** The parole board is a bully to inmates and those who are part of them have no idea or just ignore what goes on a prison. The parole board automatically denies requests based on past experiences and provides no opportunity for exceptions. In my opinion, there are a lot of inmates, including my foster brother, who have made stupid life decisions when they were younger but are different people now. They aren't given a chance at life.
- **Inmate Deaths:** Inmate deaths in prisons concern me as it seems that the state covers up the reason of death. The state should make reasonable efforts to have an unbiased autopsy and investigation performed. I am almost certain that most of those are due to neglect from the unit. The state of Texas needs to be held responsible. I am afraid that weather and medical neglect also play a role in these deaths.

PROPOSED SOLUTIONS:

- **Living Conditions:** Provide inmates with clean mattresses. Have pest control go to the facilities often and provide them with basic toiletries and clean towels.
- **A/C and Heating:** All units need to install cooling/heating systems as soon as possible. While I applaud the TDCJ is trying to be more proactive here, this is an issue that needs immediate attention.
- **Food:** TDCJ should provide all inmates with proper food portions. Food provided should be like that given at public schools and include hearty options.
- **Securus:** Securus should provide inmates with a free monthly quota of emails/phone calls for loved ones. Isolation from the world won't help them positively integrate into the community.
- **Visitations:** Allow for friends to have contact visits with inmates. If needed, partner with DPS to do a background check, if safety is an issue.

- **Body Cameras:** All guards and staff who interact with inmates should wear a body camera at all times. This will ensure trust and allow for evidence to tell its story, especially now that inmate rights are being violated by the state.
- **Unannounced Leadership Visits:** Just like in foster care when licensing stops unannounced, TDCJ leadership and ombudsmen staff should do frequent unannounced visits to the prisons to ensure that all units are following proper rules and procedures.
- **Parole:** The Parole Board should be completely reformed and include folks with prior incarceration experience and families affected along with those who already serve. The board should have the flexibility to make sentence exemptions in a case-by-case situation. Some people should not spend over 20 years in prison. The person who murdered my dad was sentenced to 20 years meanwhile my younger teen foster brother was sentenced to more than that. How is that possible? Well, because of this corrupted system who makes money out of them.
- **Inmate Deaths:** Have an external agency conduct investigations thoroughly. The horror stories I hear from loved ones on the unit neglect are concerning.

Thank you for the opportunity to share my concerns. Please take immediate action for a system reform.

Regards,

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