

# TEXAS INMATE MAIL SUPPORT ADVOCATES

ADVOCACY – EDUCATION – SUPPORT – COMPASSION

PO BOX 580247 - KISSIMMEE, FL 34758

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## THE LATEST ANNOUNCEMENTS, NEWS AND UPDATES!

### Introduction

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They say everything happens for a reason, and here at TIMSA we believe that to be true. We sent out our newsletters in early spring twice and for some reason these did not reach the units. We are very sorry for that. But we believe the powers that be delayed it for reasons we now understand.

About 8 months ago, Casey Phillips joined TIMSA as the Director of Family Services. Many of you know Casey from her fight for her husband's life and her desire to fight for Air-Conditioning in Texas Prisons. She was and remains the president of TPAA (Texas Prison Air-Conditioning Advocates). TPAA is not as it once was the changes ahead will bring great joy to so many of you.

I have known Casey for four years and our visions have always been in alignment with one another. We desire to help as many as we can who are fighting for their freedom. One night, not long ago, we found a way to merge TIMSA and TPAA in a joint venture that can and will help those on their quest for a second or even third chance. We have officially launched TIMSA-TPAA Parole Support Group. This will be a subsidiary of TIMA and TPAA. Giving us the means and ability to teach, train, educate, guide, and offer professional services.

We have both been advocates for what is right and fight for the injustices we see. We have recently seen where parole service companies are charging the same fees as attorneys, and we knew we had to fight that battle. We have adapted a business model that will allow us to guide those who are able to create their own parole packets, host webinars for those who want to learn and to offer the paid services for parole packet preparation.

In the upcoming months, we will also be adding on correspondence courses for Conflict Resolution, Navigating Difficult Conversation, Financial Planning. These all come with a certificate of completion. We currently have our Together in Texas Premarital course. Couples Communication, Professional Goal Setting, and Love Languages workshops.

Our end goal is to help you become the better version of yourselves, providing you with resources to be successful all without taking advantage of your wallet. If you, or your loved one has any questions, you can write us (TIMSA – P.O. Box 580247 – Kissimmee, FL 34746) and your loved ones can find us online [timsadvocates.com](http://timsadvocates.com), on Facebook Texas Inmate Mail Support Advocates, or our new parole group TIMSA – TPAA Parole Support Group. We are excited to bring each of you on this journey with us.

I want to share even more exciting news with you. The Texas Prison advocacy groups are all here with a positive purpose to serve you and your families. In recent days, Tatiana Santollo has branched out on her own with the same goals as TIMSA. Her new group is Texas Prisons Alliance. She and her team are on a mission to help train and educate families to be your voice. This exciting to have a solid group of advocates working together with a similar goal. You and your family members will start to see and hear from TPA. We are happy to see them building their platform and reaching those in need. Your family and loved ones can find TPA on Facebook under Texas Prisons Alliance.

## A Word From Our President

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TRICIA MORENO – RUIZ  
PRESIDENT

Greetings! I hope and pray that each of you reading this are in good health and spirits.

At TIMSA we have been redeveloping our mission and how we serve the community. The more we grow, the more our mission and way we assist families will change. This flexibility is necessary in the world of advocacy. We must adapt to the changes around us to assist you and your family members.

For a short while now, I have been assisting families who reach out with parole packet preparation and assistance. I did not advertise this service and was unable to commit to launching this as a full-time service. In the blink of an eye, the winds of change came our way and there was a void in the community and an immediate need for this service. Casey and I worked quite well together when I was her Director of Family Mediators at TPAA. The partnership just made sense. We have put a program in place that helps families with any need they may have when it comes to preparing your parole packets. There will be much more to come on this !

As it relates to Creative Cactus, we have made the hard decision to retire from the greeting card business. It has been a tough decision and it breaks our hearts to make this announcement. We are still an approved vendor and will continue to offer our puzzle books (Crosswords, Sudoku, Word Search and Word finds) at an affordable cost. These can be ordered and sent directly to you! Believe me when I say that this breaks my heart. It is one of the hardest "Goodbyes" I have ever had to make. We will still find ways to help your loved one(s) send you all their love!

We look forward to the bright future ahead at TIMSA and we hope you are ready for all the great things we are working on for each of you!

## A Word From Our CEO

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"Ruff, ruff, ruff, ruff " The "ruff" translation for that is: I hope all of you are doing well. I have been hard at work chasing Florida Alligators and all the big birds of prey !



LUPITA ESPERANZA  
CEO

I am a red-blooded American Staffordshire Terrier, or Pitbull for short, though my parental units would argue that it is not terrier it is terror.

I enjoy daily car rides, Starbucks and the occasional chicken nuggets. It is exhausting chasing birds and alligators, but someone must do it. Don't worry, I don't catch them. I go after the larger birds like the Sandhill Cranes, Bald Eagles and Turkey Vultures. They seem to fly away before I can get close enough. It is like I am a day late and dollar short! Oh the tragedy!

From what the hoomans in my life say, it is funny to watch me run run run, and never catch what I am chasing. Kind of like the Greyhounds at the dog races. I hope have added some humor to your day. My message should be inspirational of sorts. I never keep chasing my goals and neither should any of you. Put your paws forward and keep moving. Winston Churchill once said, "If you're going through hell, keep going". You've already survived 100% of every bad day you have ever had. Keep going, you've got this!

# Scam Alerts

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This is a very hard section for me to write in each newsletter. It is hard because it seems it is a never-ending issue. It is important to discuss the behavior and what to look for. These are conversations you should be having with your family members as well. If it seems too good to be true, then believe me, it is.

There is a woman targeting families via Facebook Groups claiming to be an activist and taking on cases meant for an attorney. She is offering a Commutation of Sentence a/k/a "Time Cuts". One of the most recent families she has targeted has paid her thousands of dollars. So many are selling a dream and delivering a nightmare. Please ask a million questions before opening your wallet.

The process for a Commutation of Sentence is lengthy. It requires the written recommendation of 2 of the 3 trial members (Trial officials are the sheriff and district attorney of the county of conviction and the sitting judge of the court in which the conviction occurred). The written recommendations must include the following: 1. the penalty imposed now appears to be excessive, 2. A recommendation of a definite term now considered by the officials as just and proper; and 3. a statement of the reasons for the recommendation based upon facts directly related to the facts of the cases and in existence, but not available to, the court or jury at the time of the trial, or a statutory change in penalty for the crime which would appear to make the original penalty excessive.

After receiving the favorable written recommendations of the trial members, the next step is getting the majority of Texas Board of Pardons and Paroles to vote in your favor and to send the request to the governor with the request to approve the time-cut. The governor must sign the request. The last time the governor in Texas signed a request for a time cut was 2003 and at that same time denied 5 requests that were sitting on his desk for 3 years. In short, it is easier to make parole than to get a time cut granted in your favor or for those not eligible for parole, it would benefit you to save every penny you can and hire a post-conviction attorney to work your appeals process for you. Please do not fall victim to these scam artists.

Please encourage your family members to do their research. Measure twice, cut once.

## **How to avoid scams:**

**1.** Look for an official website **2.** look for their social media platform **3.** Never send payment for services if there is no official contract, the contract should be clear and concise **4.** Never pay by money transfer (Cash App, Zelle, Venmo). All payments should go through an official invoicing system. Money transfers cannot be disputed through the banks, and this is exactly why scam artists use this form of payment! **5.** If they are offering legal services, search the Texas Bar Association to ensure they are eligible to offer such services. If they are not, do not give them any money.

## **What to do if you or your loved one has been scammed:**

**1.** If they were offering legal services and are not licensed to do so, you can file a complaint with the State of Texas (<http://www.txuplc.org/Home/applaw>) If you need more information on this, please contact us. **2.** If this was a legal business that took payment for services not rendered, you or your loved one can file a complaint with the Texas Attorney General's office (<https://www.texasattorneygeneral.gov/consumer-protection/file-consumer-complaint>) and/or the Federal Trade Commission (<https://www.ftc.gov>) and **3.** Based on the amount of the service(s) your loved one can take them to small claims court. In Texas, the maximum amount for small claims court is \$20,000.

These individuals' prey on the hope and desperation of those incarcerated and their families. They are counting on you and your family to jump in feet first without asking questions. Take your time, ask all the questions and do your level best to avoid these scam artists.

# Tablets

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Our most common inquiry with tablets now is how to get repair for broken or defective tablets. If your tablet is malfunctioning and you can still power it on and access your applications, you will open the communication application and submit the ticket for repair. This will send the ticket to the Securus Site administrator. Each unit has a site administrator. The administrator is not always on site every day, but there is one assigned to oversee all units. If you are unable to submit the ticket through the communication application, you will then send an I-60 to the Securus site administrator. Keep a record of the date and time each I-60 is sent. If you have not received a response within 14 business days your family members can email Inmate technology Services (ITS) at [offenderphones@tdcj.texas.gov](mailto:offenderphones@tdcj.texas.gov). In their email, they need to include what the issue is, what you have done so far to obtain assistance. This will escalate the issue for you. You **MUST** do your part first.

Once your ticket is submitted for repair, the issue with the tablet will be investigated and the tablet will be inspected. If it is covered under the warranty, the site administrator will repair or replace the tablet. If it is determined to be a non-warranty issue, there may be a cost for repair. Securus is still rolling out the Tablet Restitution Program. If your tablet requires replacement through this program, it will take a bit of time as the program is not in place at this time.

If the tablet is used in traffic and trading or the damage to the tablet was intentional, the owner of the tablet risks being banned from the tablet program. In cases deemed to be traffic and trading and/or intentional damage, you will likely be denied a replacement under the Tablet Restitution Program. We do not know the specifics of this program yet, as they are still developing the details. This information was provided to us as there are many that have been denied replacements due to this.

## Business Resource Center

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TIMSA staff worked very hard at creating a business verification service where we hoped to have a solid list of verified businesses for families coping with incarceration. We found many challenges and misleading information while building this resource center. We have elected to not move forward with the resource center at this time but may revisit it in the future. This was a hard decision as we wanted to provide a great resource to families, but we found businesses being deceptive with us during this process and with what our mission and core values are at TIMSA we just could not take the chance at recommending businesses to you that have already been deceptive to us.

## Solicitation & Security Concerns

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This is not our first conversation about the solicitation and security concerns, and we will keep talking about it as long as there is a need. We are seeing more and more families negatively impacted by this and it is heart breaking.

Let's start with money transfers. We know from time to time we all need a little extra to make store, a new pair of shoes, money to maintain tablet subscriptions and so on. Those conversations are okay to have with your family members. However, when those conversations lead to money transfers through sites like Cashapp, Venmo and Zelle, that changes the dynamics of the conversation. Money transfers through these sites are key to continued criminal activity and are a security concern. These conversations can result in a major case and losing contact (visitation, phone and/or correspondence) with your loved one(s). If you truly love your family and friends, please do not put them in this position to lose contact with you.

There is a growing issue with passing messages for those you don't know to individuals you don't know. This is unapproved correspondence and based on the nature of the messages and to whom they are sent can lead to a major case and losing telephone privileges with your loved one. When asked to have your loved one send a message for someone you have no way to know if there is a no-contact order, order of protection or if they are on a disapproved contact list. You are potentially making your loved one complicit in violating an order of protection. Again, if you truly love your loved ones, you will not put them in this position. You should do everything in your power to protect that relationship and your ability to have contact with one another.

# Staying Cool

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It is with great sadness that I say this, The AC Bill for cooling down Texas Prisons has come so far but did not reach the finish line. We should have hope that Rep. Sherman will continue to push for this bill until it passes and is signed into law by the governor. Until then, there are so many things we can do to stay cool.

Drink plenty of water and add in the electrolytes! Your unit should be providing cool drinking water to each of you continually throughout the day.

Respite! If you are too hot and need a break from the heat, you can ask for respite and to be taken to a cooldown area of the unit. Each unit has a designated area for cooling down.

Cool-Down Showers! Each unit should be permitting cooldown showers as needed. There are some limitations to how these are offered, especially at the older units with the "cattle call" shower system. You should be permitted one if it is needed.

Cool down items! There are a few cool down items available at commissary. Those items are gym shorts, cooldown shirts and cooldown towels. These items are non-spend items. Please keep that in mind when you go to store!

Fans! Select units are eligible to have two fans per inmate. If you do not have a fan or need a second one (and are at a unit that permits the second fan), you can purchase them at commissary or your loved one can order one for you, (we have the order form within our community).

If you are being denied any of the cooldown options, put in place by the TDCJ you must file a grievance and state they are in violation of AD 10.64. If you need guidance in filing a grievance for this issue, we are here to help and can guide your loved one through the process.

## Heat Stroke Symptoms

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It is important to know the signs and symptoms of having a heat stroke. If you have any of these signs, you need to ask for medical attention immediately. If medical attention is denied, you will need to file an emergency medical grievance. Your loved one can contact Health Services ([health.services@tdcj.Texas.gov](mailto:health.services@tdcj.Texas.gov)). You will need a PHI/HIPAA/Medical Release on file for your loved one to assist with any medical concerns.

- **CONFUSION, ALTERED MENTAL STATUS, SLURRED SPEECH**
- **LOSS OF CONSCIOUSNESS (COMA)**
- **HOT, DRY SKIN OR PROFUSE SWEATING**
- **SEIZURES**
- **VERY HIGH BODY TEMPERATURE**
- **FATAL IF TREATMENT DELAYED**

If you or someone around you is struggling with these symptoms, please ask for medical assistance.

## Medical Release Form (PHI/HIPAA)

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Your loved one's love to help you. You and your wellbeing are their main concern. If anything goes wrong medically, medical assistance is needed or there is a routine medical issue, for your loved one to be involved, there needs to be a medical release, PHI or HIPAA on file. The form has many names but serves the same purpose. It gives the TDCJ permission to release your medical information to the loved one of your choice. You can ask for the medical release form by submitting an I-60 to medical and asking for the medical release form. If there is no response, your loved one can email health services and ask for one to be provided to you. The email to request this form is [health.services@tdcj.Texas.gov](mailto:health.services@tdcj.Texas.gov). This form is valid for 2 years. Our suggestion is to sign this form for 2 people that you trust with this information. This will allow you to have someone available to assist in the time of an emergency.

# We Matter Wednesdays

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It is clear that many of the bills that would benefit the incarcerated often take a ride in the back seat and it is a battle of the masses to get those bills moved to the front seat and stopping at the Governor's desk for a signature. It seems to be impossible. We are here to help show those in office that each of you matter.

TIMSA is not a political based group. We feel that educating families and assisting them with compassion is key to those who are incarcerated and their family and friends. However, we see the biggest deficiency in this community is an all-year reminder that each of you matter. You don't just matter in summer, or winter or when session is taking place. You matter all year.

Twice a month we will host We Matter Wednesday. The theme will be released to your family members and friends, who are a part of our community the week prior. We will provide them a template to follow. We encourage you to write in your own words how you matter in your letters. This is a way to keep you and your concerns in the minds of those who vote yay or nay when it is time for session. These issues need to be addressed all year, every year. Not every two years or just when it is hot or cold.

A genius once said "“Insanity is doing the same thing over and over and expecting different results.” (Albert Einstein). We have watched the same things happen year over year and the insanity just levels up each year. It is time that we as a community think outside of the box and break that cycle of insanity. It is like that same genius once said "“We cannot solve our problems with the same level of thinking that created them.”"

We hope that each of you and your family and friends will join us for this letter writing campaign.

## Grievances

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This is one subject that is an uphill battle but is a discussion we must have. We receive about 200 emails or requests for private assistance a week, sometimes more. When we reach out to ask for help, to navigate your situation or to facilitate change, we are often met with "There are no grievances and therefore there are no documented issues for this situation"

We understand many feel grievances don't help. Perhaps in some cases they do not. But they are your voice and are documented. Once your grievance reaches the Step 2 phase, that is documented in Huntsville and looked at outside of the unit.

Those grievances enable the House Representatives and Senator's to push bills to help you. If there are only a few grievances, there is not enough to indicate an issue even exists. If there are hundreds of grievances, there is a pattern and an issue. If there is a widespread issue that requires legislative change, and there are no grievances on that issue, that will indicate there is not enough documentation to support the needed change in legislation. If there is an overwhelming amount of documentation to support that need, it enables those fighting for you to push for that legislative change.

You must determine which level of difficulty you want to endure. We are not saying to file a grievance each time the wind blows. We are saying when there is a problem, and you need help with that problem that you have to help us help you.

For change to be successful, we must work as a team to make that change happen. Together Everyone Achieves More.

# Outbound Calls

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Have you called your loved one and not gotten an answer? Have you felt like they are ignoring your calls? Chances are they are not ignoring you. I can tell you that everyone in our community is excited to receive calls from each of you. Their hearts jump a million beats per second when you show up on their caller ID! There is a known issue with calls not registering or even coming through on many devices. This is a known issue on the Securus side and is primarily impacting those with the T-Mobile service.

I experienced this in late March and thought it was strange that my loved ones had not called. When I looked at the call attempts, they were calling, and the phone was not ringing at all. Not a missed call, a voice message absolutely nothing would come through. It took Securus about a week of testing the phone line to determine what the issue was. I spoke with the T-Mobile CEO's Escalation Team, and it was determined the issue was on the Securus side.

This issue is from the strict requirements put in place, by the Federal Communications Commission (FCC) to prevent spam and robot calls to cellular devices. On the surface it appears to be an issue with the cellular service (T-Mobile) but it is an issue with how the Securus system is communicating to the T-Mobile side.

It is a lengthy process for Securus to correct. Securus is aware and has asked us to collect the names of those impacted. We have submitted that information to the TDCJ and Securus and are awaiting an update.

Please have patience when calling. It could be that the calls simply are not going all the way through. One tip that we have is if you call and there is no answer, immediately call back. Don't wait an hour or thirty minutes, immediately call the person back. That will sometimes allow the call to go through.

# Replacement ID's

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Many families have contacted us due to the lengthy time it is taking for the replacement ID's to be made. In short. This comes down to staffing. The primary reason for the delay is staffing. If you have not been to store in a minimum of 30 days, have a lost ID and are waiting on the replacement, have funds on your account, and need a store spend, we can assist you. You can have your family contact us by email, or you can write us directly. We are happy to assist and have been helping many in the same situation with a one-time store spend while waiting on the replacement ID. Our email address is: [info@timsadvocates.com](mailto:info@timsadvocates.com).

If you have recently been given an SPD code and are unable to receive deposits, are on commissary restriction, or under any investigation, we will be unable to assist. This is just for those who have lost their IDs and are unable to go to store due to the missing ID.

# In Closing

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TIMSA is growing based on the needs of our community and we are grateful to have you and your loved ones in this growing community. It takes a group effort to make change, to provide education and support. We have many exciting things in development for this community and cannot wait to release each one!

We have far exceeded where I thought we would be two years into this. We listen to what families ask for and find a way to deliver and cater to the needs of the community.

We started this group to help with the visitation and mail issues we were seeing throughout the community, and we have grown in many directions. We welcome the change and growth and look forward to what the futures holds for each of us!