

texas tea newsletter

A home-brewed publisher devoted to exposing the secrets of the Texas Civil Commitment Center in Littlefield, Texas.



in this issue

What's Brewing This Month?

This month's tea consists of three different articles sharing details of a current hunger strike within a Texas prison, the overhaul of the prison phone industry, and the stigma that sex offenders face within the media.

Want to Share Your Story?

Send any crucial documentation you want to share with us to texasteanewsletter@gmail.com or to P.O. Box 3226, San Marcos, Texas 78666 to allow us to enact change within the Texas Civil Commitment

let's spill the tea

By the Editor

Greetings and Happy New Year to all the readers of the Texas Tea Newsletter! I wanted to start off by saying thank you to all of the ones that support us and the work that we do. My resolution this year is to try and answer letters and correspond more with y'all.

The Texas Tea Newsletter works very closely with the members of F.A.C.T.S. (Families Against Committing Texans Standup) and its members. I have been given permission to publish some of their contact information, so please reach out to these ladies and encourage your families to get in touch. It is very important that we continue to grow our group and support one another in this. I also wanted to stress the importance of documentation, statements, and affidavits. Times, dates, and any events that can help in building evidence need to be written and sent in. I know that there are critics who feel like nothing is being done to help...and to those I say that something is being done every single day. There is a handful of ladies working their butts off daily helping their loved ones and men they have never met to bring change, relief, and justice. I have listed their emails below, but they can also be contacted at their respective Facebook pages!

Lastly, I want to offer my best wishes, prayers, and love in 2023. I know it may seem bleak at times, but a change is coming!

Jennifer Williams – jlouwilliams2010@yahoo.com Mandi Brady – mandilharter@gmail.com

Lonnell Hanks – lhanks133@gmail.com

Texas Prisoners Go on Hunger Strike to Protest Solitary Confinement

By **Paul Flahive** with NPR | January 16, 2023

A MARTÍNEZ, HOST:

Dozens of prisoners across Texas are nearly a week into a hunger strike in protest of what they say is inhumane treatment. The inmates, all men, want an end to solitary confinement. Paul Flahive of Texas Public Radio has been following the story, and he joins us now from San Antonio.

Paul, so what do the inmates say about the conditions they're living in?

PAUL FLAHIVE, BYLINE: Yeah. The men are in restrictive housing, or what's better known as solitary confinement, where they spend up to 22 hours a day in their cells. In a letter to state legislators, they said staffing shortages have made the situation even worse, where one prison unit - Collier unit - men had only had outside recreation a handful of time in three years, and staff struggled to give them access to showers more than once a week. State officials have contested those descriptions, but the strikes are happening in as many as 14 units across the state. And the State Department of Criminal Justice says 72 inmates are participating, though outside organizers say it's more like a 300.

MARTÍNEZ: Why does the state of Texas say these inmates are being kept in solitary confinement?

FLAHIVE: They say it's good for staff and other inmates - many of the men in solitary because they are determined to be a high escape risk. They've got disciplinary violations like assault. But many are members of restricted gangs. So some are being separated simply because of their status as gang members. And prison administrators say they use an exhaustive process to determine who should be in solitary, and it's reviewed periodically. A spokesperson said the state's made big strides in reducing the number of inmates in this secure detention, dropping 65% over the past 15 years from about 9,000 to just over 3,100 now.

MARTÍNEZ: All right. What are the

inmates saying?

FLAHIVE: We've reached out to several, but we have not been able to connect just yet. We've seen letters they've sent to state lawmakers with their demands and concerns. These inmates, especially the gang members, say they shouldn't be punished for just being in a gang. For them to get out of solitary, they must go through a renouncement and denouncement program, which oftentimes means snitching on their inmates, which puts them at risk. Some have been inside for over a decade, say researchers. Advocate Brittany Robertson has been in touch with some of these inmates. She says they want the state to stop holding people indefinitely this way and to build a step-down program so inmates can acclimate to the general population before they're released from prison.

BRITTANY ROBERTSON: Eighty percent of them will enter the community. And these are men who have dealt with isolation and can suffer from PTSD, psychosis and hallucinations. And there's nothing preparing them. Some of them have been in for 20 years.

FLAHIVE: Prison officials say these are violent and organized gangs, and they can't trust them to have free rein to recruit throughout the jails.

MARTÍNEZ: Then why did the Texas institute this sweeping solitary confinement system in the first place?

FLAHIVE: Yeah, Texas had an explosion of prison gangs and violence in the mid-'80s, and the state - it needed to implement this to secure those programs. Today people who follow criminal justice say it simply amounts to torture. In fact, I spoke to a number of prison researchers. And Texas is now just one of the handful of states to still use this administrative segregation based on gang membership. California stopped a similar practice nearly a decade ago after a weeklong hunger strike involving hundreds of inmates and a class-action lawsuit.

MARTÍNEZ: All right. That's Paul Flahive, a reporter with Texas Public Radio. Paul, thanks a lot.

FLAHIVE: Thank you.

The \$1.4B Prison Phone Call Industry Gets an Overhaul

By **Jacob Cohen** with **The Hustle** | January 16, 2023



Last week, Congress passed the Martha Wright-Reed Just and Reasonable Communications Act of 2022.

The act, which now just needs President Biden's signature, will allow the Federal Communications Commission to regulate the rates of prison phone calls.

Here's Why That's a Big Deal

The prison phone call industry generates ~\$1.4B each year.

The Prison Policy Initiative pins the average cost of a 15-minute phone call from jail at ~\$3. That doesn't include all the other fees associated with these calls, including setting up and adding funds to required prepaid accounts.

- In 63% of cases, inmates' family members shoulder these bills. Among them, 83% are women. According to the Ella Baker Center, over a third of paying families go into debt over the calls.

Historically, the FCC has limited the cost of cross-state phone calls to 21 cents per minute for prepaid calls. Problem is, 80% of these calls are made in-state. With the passing of this bill, the FCC will be able to cap in-state prices.

"Today... the FCC will be granted the authority to close this glaring, painful, and detrimental loophole in our phones rate rules for incarcerated people," FCC Chairwoman Jessica Rosenworcel said.

Pedophilia And The Media: A Message From The Comms Director of a Sexual Offense Law Reform Advocacy Group

By **Sandy Rozek** with **The Crime Report** | January 11, 2023

Which of these would you favor as a husband for your beloved daughter?

‘The slick fella, too handsome for his own good, whose shifty eyes furtively appraised the family silver,’ or, ‘the well-dressed, good-looking young man whose frank curiosity about the family heirlooms showed an appreciation for life’s finer things.’

Why?

Word choice makes all the difference. Some words are so emotionally laden with either positive or negative connotations that just using them automatically produces the corresponding emotion in the reader or hearer. Producers of media know this and often choose emotionally loaded language to sway the readers to their way of thinking. This is fine for editorials and opinion pieces, but the purveyors of news pieces bear the responsibility of using neutral language, of presenting the facts, the “plain, unvarnished truth,” and allowing readers to form their own conclusions.

These are the facts about the term pedophilia. It is a medical term, not a legal one. There are no laws or statutes criminalizing pedophilia. Depression might cause a person to shoplift, but the criminal act is shoplifting, not having depression. Not everyone who shoplifts has depression, and not all with depression shoplift.

The same is true with pedophilia. Not everyone who molests a child has pedophilia – in fact, research suggests the percentage is low – and not everyone with pedophilia has engaged in any criminal conduct, including molesting a child. And certainly, not all registrants are pedophiles.

Sexual convictions run the gamut from public exposure to violent rape.

Recently a series of news stories were published in Joliet, Illinois, by Joliet’s local Patch homepage. The situation is one where the mayor is doing his best – or worst — to close down an apartment building designed as reentry housing for men with sexual crime convictions. After losing round one by way of a federal ruling, Mayor Bob O’Dekirk launched round two: the city bought a lot with a vacant house a block away from NewDay Apartments, the home of the registrants and for full disclosure, one of NARSOL’s many partners in implementing fact-driven policies that advance meaningful criminal justice reform.

The mayor’s plan, unanimously approved by city council without a grandfather clause, is to demolish the home and create a park/playground there. Projected to be functional by June 2023, the park would place the residents of the apartment building out of compliance with state law and effectually, the mayor hopes, put the apartments out of business. Called a “pocket park,” Joliet is not the first city to resort to this strategy in order to make areas uninhabitable for registered individuals.

Joliet Patch, the local news homepage for the town on Patch.com has published four articles about the situation in Joliet, three since city hall got involved. Those three all scream, in huge headers, about the “Pedophile Palace” that the mayor has sworn to shut down.

Of all words in our language designed to evoke a strong, visceral, negative reaction, that one ranks right at the top. Seldom fully understood, almost always misused, and often misspelled, pedophilia requires a qualified physician’s diagnosis before one can accurately be labeled a pedophile.

Patch is not the only media outlet to choose and misuse that word to steer readers and listeners toward a specific reaction. Some weeks prior to the most recent article in Joliet, in a recent broadcast of Tucker Carlson, Fox News, in bold headlines, announced, “TUCKER CARLSON: No healthy society can tolerate pedophilia,” with a sub-heading of

“Tucker speaks out against child sexual abuse.” The connection is made: Pedophilia and child sexual abuse are interchangeable terms.

In another video, Carlson bemoans the fact that California is “Putting thousands of pedophiles back on the street.” He is speaking of individuals who have been convicted of a sexual crime, have completed the court-ordered incarceration period, and are released under community supervision for the remainder of the sentence.

Once again, the connection between the word and the crime is inescapable, and now not only is child sexual abuse the same as pedophilia, but also everyone on the registry for any sexual crime is a pedophile.

But it is a false connection.

Carlson and Fox News ignore the facts and do everything possible to cement the false connection and establish a belief in the viewers’ minds that precludes any reasonable and factual discussion about sexual offending.

Throughout the Joliet pieces, other pejorative language is used. The apartment dwellers are “sexual predators” at every possible occasion, not “men,” not “tenants,” but “sexual predators.”

Tucker continues to use “pedophile/pedophilia” as often as possible, but at least his rhetoric is labeled “opinion.”

I reached out to *Joliet Patch* and to Tucker Carlson’s team while working on this piece, but have not heard back. Words shape our beliefs, opinions, and actions. They also shape the beliefs, opinions and actions of our lawmakers, and inaccurate words and words whose meanings have been twisted will lead to laws and policies that are inaccurate and twisted. Laws that are based on falsehoods and incorrect beliefs do not advance public safety.

Legislation grounded in empirical evidence and arrived at in the cold, impassionate light of accurate and connotation-free verbiage has the very best chance of providing society with laws that are fair, just, and work as they should.

