

# 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 includes a shocking story of the lengths a resident went to escape the Minnesota Sex Offender Program, how Texas prison inmates are allegedly dying of heat-related illnesses, a research article over sex offender treatment programs shared by the Florida Action Committee, and an Insider News submission by MSOP resident Daniel A. Wilson.

### Want to Share Your Story?

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

## let's spill the tea

By the Editor

Greetings everyone, and welcome to another issue of the Texas Tea Newsletter!

To start off, we here at TTN have received several letters from residents and loved ones alike for permission to use the resources included in our issues. And the answer is: of course! Any and all information that is published in our works is strictly put in to aid and benefit the residents of civil commitment facilities and their family members. Do not be shy, and do not let others be in control of your right to freedom and the pursuit of happiness.

On another note, there will be a Texas Civil Commitment Office Board Meeting on August 25<sup>th</sup> at 10:00 AM sharp. Please notify your loved ones on the outside and strongly advise them to attend if they are able. We want more activist are packed into that room than ever before! Let's all work together to bring change and justice to the Texas Civil Commitment Center!

Lastly, it is almost school season. With a college student apart of the TTN Editing Team, patience would be greatly appreciated when you are expecting subsequent issues. We always put in effort in researching our newsletter topics and try to send out up-to-date stories, but with classes starting soon, there may be some wait times for a fresh cup of tea.

## ‘I was meaning to kill somebody’: Man Sentenced for Attacking Moose Lake MSOP Worker

By **Cara Kopp** with **Northern News Now** | July 17, 2023

Some chilling admissions in the Carlton County Courthouse Monday from the man who brutally attacked a staff member inside the Minnesota Sex Offender Program facility.

“Yes, I was meaning to kill somebody that day,” said Nicolas Aron-Jones, the man who attacked the MSOP staff member. “If I have to go back, it’s going to happen again.”

Aron-Jones was talking about when he hit a 53-year-old security counselor over the head with a blunt object, saying he did it because he claims there was patient mistreatment at the facility.

“I apologize that it had to happen to you, but at the end of the day it would happen again,” said Aron-Jones. “They were taunting me, asking me crazy things. At the end of the day, I can’t take it, I can’t be here, so I’m going to get up out of here.”

Aron Jones says he was trying to kill someone, hoping to be served a sentence to life in prison, rather than remain at the MSOP.

“He nearly killed a staff member that had done him no wrong, and as the court has heard today, barely even knew him,” said Jeffery Boucher, the victim’s attorney. In Court, he even went as far to ask the judge for the maximum penalty, a statement that shocked even the judge.

“It also is troublesome to the court that I am going to sentence you to exactly what you want, to be some place other than where you were,” said Judge Amy Lukasavits, with Carlton County.

Judge Lukasavits sentenced him to 18 years at the St. Cloud Correctional Facility, saying that she hopes he will avoid using

violence as a means to get what he wants.

“I don’t know that two wrongs make a right in this situation,” said Judge Lukasavits.

In court, the victim did address Aron-Jones, saying he is a predator, and his injuries will affect him in the long term.

## Prisoners’ Relatives and Former Inmates Plead for Help as Deaths Mount in Sweltering Texas Prisons

By **Jolie McCullough** with **Northern News Now** | July 18, 2023



*Tona Southards, whose 36-year-old son died in a Texas prison during the June 2023 heat wave, falls to her knees as she leads a prayer circle outside the Texas Capitol. Southards and other prison rights advocates called for Gov. Greg Abbott to call a special session to install air conditioning in Texas prisons.*

Shouting, screaming and crying with raw desperation, dozens of prisoners’ relatives and former inmates gathered at the state Capitol Tuesday begging, once again, for state officials to install air conditioning in Texas prisons.

“They’re cooking our babies alive!” wailed a grieving mother, whose 36-year-old son died unexpectedly in an uncooled prison last month.

As a seemingly unending heatwave bears down across Texas, prison rights advocates and several lawmakers

demanded the governor call an immediate special legislative session to cool prisons. Though similar measures failed in the Legislature earlier this year, the current heat crisis and a fear for the safety of those inside spurred them to try again.

“This is not a political issue. This is a humanity issue. I’m sick and tired of dealing with rich people problems,” said state Rep. Carl Sherman, D-DeSoto, referring to the property tax fight that swallowed the entirety of lawmakers’ summer. “This is about survival.”

Gov. Greg Abbott’s office did not respond to questions about the special session call Tuesday. In May, the Texas Senate killed the House’s proposal to invest more than half a billion dollars into air conditioning prisons.

The brutal heat inside Texas’ uncooled prisons has killed prisoners, sickened guards and cost the state millions of taxpayer dollars in wrongful death and civil rights lawsuits. Though the Texas Department of Criminal Justice has not acknowledged that a prisoner died from the heat since 2012, a multi-university study reported last year that as many as 13% of deaths in Texas prisons during warm months could be caused by the heat.

This year, since mid-June, at least nine prisoners have died of reported heart attacks or cardiac events in uncooled prisons where the outdoor heat indices were above 100 degrees, according to a Texas Tribune analysis of prison death reports and weather data. At least another 14 have died of unknown causes in extreme heat, often found unresponsive in their cells by prison staff.

It’s not clear how much of a role, if any, the heat played in the 23 deaths. TDCJ spokesperson Amanda Hernandez said last month it is inaccurate to label any death as heat-related before an investigation is complete.

Last week, she said the agency had preliminarily ruled at least four of the cardiac arrest deaths as unconnected to the heat, though autopsies are still pending. In at least one case, the agency believed a 35-year-old man who died of cardiac arrest was on drugs, which notoriously run rampant inside Texas prisons.

But heat-caused deaths are often undercounted and misclassified, according to medical experts, and an abundance of studies link an increase in fatal heart failures to extreme heat. Often, it's impossible to know if a heart attack or any other fatal event was caused by heat stroke unless the body temperature is measured at the time.

TDCJ has not said if it checks the temperatures of prisoners in medical distress during heat waves.



*Kristie Williams cries as she speaks of her brother, 35-year-old Tommy McCullough, who died in an uncooled Texas prison last month.*

For prisoners and their loved ones, the heat's role is obvious. On her son's final day of life, Tona Southards said he told her on the phone that he wasn't feeling well, confessing, "Mama, I'm scared."

Jon Anthony Southards, 36, died of unknown causes at the Estelle Unit in Huntsville on June 28. He was found unresponsive in his cell that night. The heat index outside the prison reached 116 degrees that day, according to TDCJ heat logs.

His mother appeared before lawmakers and the press Tuesday wearing his TDCJ ID tag and "prison whites," the common name for TDCJ-assigned

clothes. She spoke in sermons, reflecting on her son's life and talents — he was an excellent artist and musician, and condemning the state for its role in his death.

"Though it may be too late for my son, Jon Anthony Southards, it is not too late for the men and women that are still serving time in these ovens," she bellowed. "Enough is enough!"

More than two-thirds of Texas' 100 prisons don't have air conditioning in most living areas. Every summer, thousands of officers and tens of thousands of prisoners work and live inside concrete and steel buildings without ventilation. While temperatures are routinely in the triple digits outside, the thermometer reading often rises even higher inside.

"All those folks who say, 'I grew up in a house with no AC,' you didn't grow up in a place with no ventilation, in a metal building or brick, on the fourth floor ... and you couldn't get outside," Sherman said.

Inside the House Speaker's press room and out on the Capitol steps, a call-and-response formed among all those who knew through their own experience or that of their relatives the fear of living through Texas summer in prison. They wiped tears from their cheeks, interjecting "right now!" during speeches to express their urgency.

"It's hot today, but it's only getting hotter," Sherman concluded. "And I don't want to visit anymore mothers who lost their children because we weren't thoughtful."

## Client Evaluations of Sex-Offender Therapy

By **Florida Action Committee** | June 19, 2023

Most research dealing with the effectiveness of sex-offender therapy has been quantitative, mainly looking at the sexual recidivism rates "as the primary

measure of successful outcomes in criminal rehabilitation, while other indicators of client improvement and well-being have been ignored" (Levenson et al., 2020; National Academies of Sciences & Medicine, 2022). Much of the qualitative research on sex-offender treatment appears to be conducted outside of the United States.

*In Learning from Consumers of Mandated Sex-Offending Programs: "It's Not Treatment, I Wish It Was."*, by Jill S. Levenson, Melissa D. Grady, Heike Lasoski, and Kyle T. Collins, a qualitative study was done to "explore clients' perceptions of sex-offending treatment."

"People required to register as sex offenders and their family members were recruited with assistance from several registry reform advocacy groups in the United States." The survey was anonymous and confidential.

Individuals felt their treatment was a positive experience when the following objectives were met by the therapist:

- Helped to gain insight about themselves
- Peer support and interaction in group sessions
- Positive experience with the therapist
- Learning ways to manage problematic behavior

Individuals felt their therapy was more of a negative experience when the following techniques were used:

- Felt coerced to make certain statements, whether true or not
- Being treated disrespectfully by therapist
- Feeling their particular therapist was unqualified
- Use of outdated methods that were not research based or individualized

This study should be read by all therapists and clients, along with other stakeholders. Hopefully the findings of this study will be incorporated into future sex-offender therapy programs everywhere.

## Insider News

### Shadow Prisoners in Minnesota Honor an End MSOP Coalition Fallen Comrade

By **Daniel A. Wilson, a Resident of MSOP** | July 10, 2023

On Monday, June 26, 2023 the Shadow Prisoners in Moose Lake, Minnesota received news that they had lost Sara Brainerd, a fellow comrade in their fight for freedom. In honor of Sara and her family we recognize the work she did as an End MSOP activist.

On May 23, 2023 Sara posted the following quote by Eve Ensler to the Voices of OCEAN Facebook page:

*An activist is someone who cannot help but fight for something. That person is not usually motivated by a need for power or money or fame but in fact is driven slightly mad by some injustice, some cruelty, some unfairness, so much so that he or she is compelled by some internal moral engine to act to make it better.*

Sara was among the original founders of the End MSOP Coalition. She spoke at many anti-MSOP events including the 2021 OCEAN Community Conference and Rally, Metro State University and Minnesota State University, Mankato. She protested on behalf of Shadow Prisoners at the Governor's Mansion and met with MSOP administration on several occasions, pleading with them to loosen their grip of tyranny.

During one End MSOP Zoom conference, Sara stated:

*...I not only have a brother that's been in MSOP for 11 years... I'm also a rape survivor [and] a kidnapping survivor so I'm not naive to [this]... I get the other side too. I really get it... [But]... I would never wish a life sentence on any of my perpetrators.*

What began as a fight for her brother turned into something much more. Sara understood that by ending MSOP, she was ultimately protecting the public from sexual violence. Sara explains her position in an online commercial that reached thousands:

*...The program has done nothing to protect our women, children, and vulnerable loved ones. Lawmakers in Minnesota are taking taxpayer's money from effective programs, spending over \$100 million dollars every year on this program which makes our communities more dangerous, not safer. In fact, the same year that Minnesota cut its funding for sexual violence prevention programs by \$3.6 million per year, it spent \$26 million of taxpayer money on the MSOP...*

At a convention at Metro State University on April 8, 2022, Sara exposed MSOP for what it really is:

*[Taxpayers] are all paying... a hundred million dollars and it's not working. Nobody's getting out. This is a death sentence... our coalition, End MSOP... need people to get involved and start speaking out to your local politicians and people in your community because people don't know these Shadow Prisons exist... People change... I'm 47 years old and I'm still changing every year, every couple of years. I'm a different person and I believe... these people... can change... A lot of people have nobody on the outside. Nobody is writing them letters. There is nobody to call. So, they call people like me to talk to vent or for advocacy... just care about people.*

After Sara's death, Merry Schoon, a fellow member of the End MSOP Coalition sent an email to Jodi Harpstead, the Commissioner of DHIS:

*Dear Mrs. Harpstead,*

*Time is precious. We learned this the hard way when on June 26 2023, our coalition discovered that one of our most vital members passed away in her sleep. Sara always had a smile on her face.*

*Her heart was the biggest I've seen in years. She accepted and loved everyone for who they were. She fought hard for her brother's release*

*in hopes that they could spend time together outside of those cement walls. And now that will never happen for them.*

The idea of being locked up indefinitely is a hard pill to swallow not only for those detained, but for those who love them as well. It's as though we are all in this never-ending purgatory waiting for that one thing that will end this nightmare, while we pray that it will happen before one of us dies.

Sara and Duncan lost that battle and now we worry endlessly about Duncan. Will he have the strength to push on? Or will he try to join her, as he has so many times tried to take his own life due to the abuse he has suffered in this place you call treatment.

Sara's loss will only push us harder to fight for the freedoms our loved ones have earned and free ourselves as well. Sara's voice was the one that said "we will never stop!" and we owe it to Sara to keep fighting in her place. RIP Sara Brainerd. (1974-2023)

End MSOP Coalition, Merry Schoon.

On June 24, 2023 Sara joined the RAFC, a Detainee lead advocacy group operating from inside MSOP. Sara passed less than 48 hours after her first meeting with the council. When Sara said, "We will never stop!" she really meant it. Sara Brainerd was a true activist who fought her cause until her final breath.

