

## PUBLIC SAFETY MANIFESTO

It is well past time to address the egregious practices that are exercised by the Texas Department of Criminal Justice (TDCJ), in the handling of certain gangs/organizations throughout the Texas Penal system.

Certain Gangs/Groups/Organizations are labeled Security Threat Groups (STG) by TDCJ. In the early 1980s, prison was a different setting than you will see today. TDCJ had a castigatory ideology instead of imagining the rehabilitation of the prisoner. During this time, TDCJ "designated" certain groups as the most problematic. There was a temporary abridgement to operating procedure of housing inmates who belonged to these groups in their cells. This practice morphed into policy, these groups were labelled STG, and were housed in Administration Segregation (Ad Seg), indefinitely.

An inmate may be "confirmed" as a member of an STG by self-admission, tattoos and symbols, written materials, photographs, TDCJ staff information, information from other agencies, association with other gang affiliates, information from informants, prior gang related crimes, legal documentation, and visitation or communication with known gang affiliates.

Once the suspicion of gang activity is detected, the Unit Gang Investigator (GI) initiates an investigation into the inmate's possible gang involvement. If the investigation, by the GI, ends with the inmate tagged as a member of an STG, the investigation report is then turned over to the Unit Classification Committee (UCC). The UCC then Reviews the "gang file" that has been compiled by the GI and the decision is made if there should be a subsequent review by the regional director (RD). The RD will then review the evidence and send the report/case to the final review, by the State Classification Committee.

Once an inmate has been confirmed as a member of an STG, he is then deemed to be a threat to the safety of TDCJ staff and inmates held in General Population (GP) and a risk of being disruptive to the orderly operations of the institution. The inmate is then held in Ad Seg, without ever committing a rule infraction, to be housed in Segregation.

The main organizations/groups/gangs that are targeted, and labeled STG, by TDCJ are the Aryan Brotherhood of Texas (ABT), Aryan Circle (AC), Barrio Azteca, Bloods, Crips, Hermosa Beach Locals (HBL), Partido Revolution Mexicano (PRM), Mexican Mafia (EME), Texas Mafia, Texas Syndicate (TS), Roza Unida (RU), and Texas Chicano Brotherhood (TCB). The inmates that are labelled by TDCJ cover a broad spectrum of races including Blacks, Latinos, Hispanics, Tejano, Chicano, and White.

## **MENTAL HEALTH EFFECTS**

Studies have shown that housing inmates in prolonged stays in segregation isolation have debilitating health effects including, but not limited to, Suicidal Tendencies, Panic Attacks, and Paranoia among other Health Issues.

Anti-Social Disorder is considered to be the leading Mental Health enigma amongst incarcerated individuals. An elongated stay in Administrative Segregation, isolated from other inmates, only augments the consequences of the Anti-Social Mental Health Disorder, that has been found to be statistically high in prisoners.

In addition, among the correlational studies of the relationship between housing types have shown to prove that there are deteriorating mental and physical health issues prevalent in inmates that are housed, for prolonged stays, in Administrative Segregation. Reports have shown to have more cases of Self-Mutilation, Suicidal Ideation and Behavior, Hyper Sensitivity, Hallucinations,

a Sense of Emotional Breakdown, Hopelessness, Different Forms of Duress (beyond self-injury), Other Directed Violence, such as attacks on staff, Destruction of Property, and Verbal Violence toward TDCJ staff, other inmates and to their own Family Members. The physical impact of these consequences are as detrimental as the mental health issues as well. Inmates are limited to movement with just one hour a day out of their cell to exercise in a small cage with nothing but a pull-up bar. The limited movement creates a wide range of physical health issues such as Cardio-Vascular Disease, Aches and pains in Joints, near and far sighted vision impairment, Hypertension, Vitamin D deficiency to name a few common ailments.

A report prepared by Craig Haney of The University of California, Santa Cruz, said, "To Summarize, there is not a single published study of solitary confinement in which Non-Voluntary Confinement lasting for longer than 10 days, where participants were unable to terminate their isolation at will, that failed to result in negative psychological effects." He further names the most prevalent negative Psychological effects as: Hypertension, Uncontrollable Anger, Hallucinations, Emotional Breakdowns, Chronic Depression, and Suicidal Thoughts and Behavior.

The word "Penitentiary" derived from an old Quaker belief that, "Solitude fostered PENITENCE and reformation. Solitary Confinement began in the early 1800s as a misguided attempt at Rehabilitation. There was a dispatch of foreign attaches that toured American prisons in 1831 and were horrified at what they saw. It was the famous author, Charles Dickens, who wrote after being revolted at what he saw, while visiting an American Prison in 1842, "I hold this slow and daily tampering with the mysteries of the brain to be immeasurably worse than any torture of the body". Have we not learned anything since the 1800s? With roughly 145,000 inmates in TDCJ, this form of punishment is rare, or need to say, unusual, with approximately 4400 inmates housed in this cruel environment. No matter how you write, or say, this amalgamation of words, the results

are the same, prolonged stays in Solitary Confinement is a form of torture and is a cruel and unusual punishment, which is unconstitutional in the United States, a democracy.

TDCJ began this method of housing certain inmates in the early 1980s. Overcrowded conditions and lack of rehabilitation programs, education or vocational training opportunities and no faith-based programming led to too much idleness amongst the inmates.

Living in overcrowded conditions with no activities only compounded the tension between the inmates and caused an explosion in violence that resulted in a very dangerous situation. Because officials struggled to hire enough staff to manage and maintain order, eventually, TDCJ administration started isolating inmates, with ties to certain gangs, by keeping them locked in their cells. Ultimately, this is when the STG plan became standard operating procedure, throughout the Texas penal system.

Since the early 1980s the entire Correctional system has changed. We now know that Mental health and Drug Treatment programs, Educational and Vocational Training opportunities and other forms of productive activities further reform the offender and greatly reduces the recidivism rates. Why has this form of primitive punishment fallen through the cracks of prison reform?

In the TDCJ-CID Correctional Managed Health Care Policy Manual in the Evaluation and Documentation Offenders in Segregation/Restrictive housing Segment, part C section 3, states:

"Management Status, Management Restrictions and Dry Cell Isolation Offenders in forms of Segregation/Restrictive Housing must be observed by a licensed health care staff member daily. Evaluations must include an inquiry into the offender's physical and mental health status. Particular notes must be made of cuts, bruises or other evidence of trauma and alterations of mental and physical status. Vital signs and weight are taken as often as medically indicated. Offenders receiving Mental Health treatment will be assessed for mental status and appearance daily."

It's most telling that the TDCJ administration not only acknowledges that the effects of Administration-Segregation has haphazard consequences on the offender's mental health, by mandating the evaluation of each inmate on a daily basis. This admission acknowledges the psychological impact on the inmate by virtue of the fact that they have implemented this concomitant policy of daily psychological evaluation and physical observation of these offenders. There is no other type of housing that calls for this type of daily medical supervision, by TDCJ medical staffing, in the institution.

By continuing to allow this type of housing, TDCJ policies, show evidence that TDCJ is cognitive of the deleterious effects on the inmate's welfare that is traded for the security of the institution. This type of housing should only be used for inmates who have been found to have been disruptive through acts of violence carried out against other inmate and/or TDCJ staff members. Even then, the prolonged stay in restrictive housing should be abolished and a pathway back to general population should be presented, to the inmate, so his rehabilitation can continue

**NEW DATA:** Solitary Confinement increases risk of premature death within a year of being released from prison. This study was taken in 2019 by Prison Policy Initiative at the University of North Carolina, Emory University and the North Carolina Department of Public Safety and Public Health. This was a nationwide study based on data that was collected from all around the country of people who experienced Solitary Confinement compared to those who did not. The data collected showed the most common causes of death to be Opiate Overdose, Homicide and Suicide. An inmate who spent multiple or Prolonged stays in Restrictive Housing was 129% more likely to commit Suicide, 70% more likely to die from Homicide and 24% more likely to die from an Opiate Overdose. Even though these are the 3 most common forms of death recorded to be the leading causes of mortality experienced by inmates who were housed in Restrictive Housing,

while in prison, these inmates are still 38% more likely to die from other causes, than those who did not suffer multiple or prolonged stays in Solitary Confinement, within a year of their release from prison.

These reliable statistics were obtained by reliable agencies and institutions that all came to the conclusion that Multiple and prolonged stays in Solitary Confinement has had a very negative effect on the lives and psychological abilities of inmates.

As we already know, Alcoholism, Drug Addiction or Addiction to other things like sex, gambling, money, etc.... are all manifestations of mental health issues. Mental Health is a Medical matter that should not be ignored. This is no different than taking a diabetic and locking him in a cell with nothing to eat but candy bars. Just because these men have tenuously associated with a gang member, or had formerly been a member of a certain organization, or even are currently affiliated with a group, that is considered an STG, Mental Health issues cannot be ignored. Locking these men in a concrete and steel cage only magnifies and adds to their Mental Health illness. This type of treatment destroys any chance of rehabilitation and further inhibits the inmates' social skills. As the study mentioned above has proven, these inmates have a 70% greater chance of being murdered within a year of being released from prison, that is because they leave prison, literally, not knowing how to act around people. They are 129% more likely to kill themselves because they lack the ability to handle the world as they knew it.

And finally, these are 24% more likely to die, within one year of their release, from an Opiate/drug Overdose. That percent is attributable to just Opiates. It does not take into account of the percentage of deaths that are attributed to other forms of drugs and other addictions. While in Restrictive Housing the offender is not allowed to participate in drug treatment to CORRECT this distractive ailment, that most likely dictated the inmates life and decisions.

When these men are housed in Ad Seg and refused a chance to even shower daily, amongst everything else, this becomes dehumanizing. Mental Health ailments run high in most all prisoners.

By housing inmates in conditions like this and denying them the Mental Health treatment and Rehabilitation that they need to become cognitive to their own issues, TDCJ is denying the Public of its Safety. While these men are housed in Ad Seg, they are not allowed to partake in drug treatment or any other addiction-based Rehabilitation programs. They are not allowed to attend church services, continue any sort of educational or vocational training courses or any other types of productive activities. Think of the four decades and the tens of thousands, if not hundreds of thousands of inmates that have been housed in these conditions would have been able to receive Treatment, Vocational Training, Faith based services or any other forms of Rehabilitation opportunities. Think of the lives that would have changed, the skills that could have been carried back to their children, the Drug addictions that could have been defeated, the crimes that could have been prevented all due to TDCJ's out dated and barbaric policy.

There should be no issue that surpasses that of Treating the inmate's subject that led him to prison. No matter what the matter may be, TDCJ has trained staff to handle what running a prison has to offer. They should never ignore the Rehabilitation of Thousands of offenders because they are believed to pose a **POTENTIAL** threat to the orderly operations of the institution. After all, TDCJ is in the **CORRECTIONAL** business, and their ultimate job is that of **CORRECTING** criminal behavior. Correcting the behavior includes identifying and treating any Mental Health issues that, most likely, led the offender into crime. The inmate, often times, don't realize they have an issue until Treatment. This is a part of Treatment, recognizing and accepting they have a problem. By not providing the inmate the tools that they need to address their Mental Health issues, they will continue with the same way of thought and actions and will continue to commit crime

and return to prison. The public has an interest in Rehabilitating these offender's lives. There are thousands of inmates who have been or will continue being released from Ad Seg, after decades - in most cases, without ever being offered the chance to be Rehabilitated. Not to mention the years of being dehumanized and refused even contact visits with immediate family members.

### **RECIDIVISM REDUCTION PROGRAMS**

The longer an inmate is held in Administrative Segregation, the longer he will go without receiving the tools to address his individual needs, for his rehabilitation. Inmates, who are housed in Ad Seg are denied Educational classes, Vocational Training Opportunities, Drug Treatment courses, Faith Based services or any other kind of Recidivism Reduction Programming or Productive Activities.

In December of 2018, the First Step Act was signed into law. While the First Step Act does not directly affect state inmates, it has provisions that allow Federal inmates, who participate in Recidivism Evidence-Based programming, to accumulate extra time in community-based living and/or home confinement, that can be "cashed in" towards the end of their sentence. This part of the bill was coined Recidivism Reduction.

Evidence Based programming are programs that have proven to lower the rate of recidivism by collecting data from state run prison agencies, in what programs and what programs and activities are most effective. Texas is one of the state agencies that the United States Congress modeled this part of the First Step Act off of.

By monitoring and collecting data, of states, who offer Recidivism Reduction programs, we are able to track the information available, regarding the effectiveness of the Recidivism Reduction Programs, Productive Activities and Faith Based Services, that exist in state operated prisons throughout the United States. By tracking the Recidivism rates in these states, we are able

to see, based on statistical evidence, which programs are the most effective, in lowering the Recidivism rate and the ones that have the most Rehabilitative success of the inmate. Texas has attained an extraordinary accomplishment by lowering the state's Recidivism rate, which is why Congress has modeled this section of the First Step Act from Texas' success.

Programs that are offered to inmates in TDCJ, gives the offenders the opportunity to address individual needs, such as, but not limited to, Drug abuse Treatment, acquiring GED, continuing adult education, Cognitive Thinking, Changes (which has such a high success rate, this course is taught as far away as Australia, even though it was created in the Texas prison system), Vocational Training, Faith Based Services, Prisoner Entrepreneurship Program (PEP), Pre-Release Therapeutic Community (PRTC), multiple re-entry programs and many more Rehabilitative courses that have shown to lower the chance, of the inmate recidivating.

Often times an inmate will take a trade in prison and will be able to leave the institution with a whole new outlook on life. Not all crimes that are committed are crimes of violence. Crimes that are acted out for monetary gain is often committed because the offender feels they have no other way to make money. The lack of knowledge in a career field can add an immense threat to an individual committing an offense for what they firmly believe they had to do, survival. With the opportunity to learn a trade, by participating in a Vocational Training Program and to have the chance to receive their GED, through Continuing Adult Education, to not only have the skills to do the job, but also have the confidence to apply for a job, and look forward in life with confidence.

Mental Health and Addictions are issues that a person may not realize is the problem. Through Drug Treatment programs and programs that address other forms of addiction helps the inmate hear the stories of other offenders and see the similarities and identify that they have an addiction as well. Once the inmate can recognize they have a problem, they can then accept that

they have an addiction and learn how to defeat the addiction that has plagued their lives and continues to dictate their life style. Recognition of the addiction enables them to get the help they need to correct their Mental Health Illness.

Addiction is a form of Mental Health Illness that cannot be treated until the individual can see the problem for themselves. Recognition is the first step in the road to recovery.

Faith-Based Services gives the inmate access to their spirituality and enables them to feel the love from those who share the same beliefs of a higher power.

While an inmate is housed in Ad Seg, they are precluded from participating in these programs which greatly increases their risk of reoffending and subsequently returning to prison. Hence the threat to Public Safety.

## **PUBLIC SAFETY**

The Texas Department of Criminal Justice, like all law enforcement and correctional institutions, have an obligation to maintain the interest of Public Safety, as their Primary Objective. The creation of this department is for the Safety of the Public.

The whole purpose of prison is for that of Public Safety.

While TDCJ has the responsibility to create and maintain a Safe working environment for its staff and assure the Safety of the inmates remanded to the custody of the Texas Department of Criminal Justice, the prime commitment made, which is Public Safety, the integral reasoning of the Texas Department of Criminal Justice, cannot be ignored. This is paramount to their purpose.

By isolating inmates solely for being “confirmed” as members of an STG, sacrifices the obligation of Public Safety, for the substitution of TDCJ's security. Correctional Officers and staff go through, and continuously go through, extensive training to deal and de-escalate situations that can, often times, be very volatile and violent. Working in the Corrections business can be a very

dangerous occupation and should always be taken very serious by everyone involved. The training that Correctional officers and staff go through is a very broad array of training. The training that is held, by correctional officers and staff, teaches them to maintain control of the facility and assure that the Safety to its staff is upheld at all times.

Neither Public Safety nor the Safety of TDCJ staff and inmates can be neglected for the exchange of the other's success. Both commitments can, and should, be upheld with the uttermost consequential concern. The Texas Department of Criminal Justice could learn by taking notice in the way that the Federal Bureau of Prisons handles their gang population.

The Federal Bureau of Prisons (FBOP) face the same threats in the same environment with the same gangs/organizations, that TDCJ has tagged as Security Threat Groups. Every one of the organizations that have been deemed to pose a **POTENTIAL** threat to the TDCJ institute, can be found, in General Population in the Federal Bureau of Prisons.

Since the offenders that are remanded to the custody of the FBOP are not castigated for their association with certain gang organizations, the inmate is, more likely to be, forthcoming about their affiliation with said group. This makes housing the inmates on designated compounds, that does not confine members of rival organizations, possible.

The FBOP has close to the same number of facilities and inmates to be comparable to that of TDCJ, with roughly 123 institutions and around 160,000 inmates. Texas is the largest state, in the Continental United States, area wise, and second to California with the highest population. The classification and transport of prisoners are standard operational procedures that are carried out by the TDCJ agency internally. TDCJ has a system that keeps track of separatees and organizations that can't be housed on the same compound together, called, UCR 07 SCREEN. TDCJ would have a smaller area to cover, for transporting prisoners, than the FBOP and fewer organizations to

monitor. The FBOP houses inmates from all over the world and has global syndicates to take into account while classifying inmates for housing across the United States – a much more complex analysis than that used for the State of Texas.

With inmates being forthcoming about their gang affiliations, without fear of retribution, the administration would be able to house inmates on prison yards that have no rival organization(s) and monitor the group for gang activity. While in General Population the gang members would have the same opportunities, as other offenders, to participate in Recidivism Reduction programs and have the same chance at rehabilitation. The members of these organizations would be able to take the classes that they are exempt from, such as Cognitive Thinking, Changes, PEP, Continuing Adult Education, Resume Building, Vocational Training, Faith Based services and other types of Evidence Based Recidivism Reduction programs and productive activities.

By isolating these inmates away from General Population, not allowing the programming, that has incontrovertible proof of dropping the Recidivism rate, isolating them to minimal to no physical activities, creates a worse individual than TDCJ, themselves, defined as a threat to their own safety and security, just to release them back to society, after decades, in some cases, with worse social skills - no drug treatment - no mental health treatment no educational or vocational training opportunities - after years of going without ever touching, even their immediate, family - inoculated with hate from years of being dehumanized - and in most cases in poor physical condition, is a greater threat the Public Safety than the offender posed before entering the TDCJ Correctional institution.

TDCJ has been trading the Safety of the public and protecting its institution from a presumptive threat to its own security. TDCJ treats these inmates in this manner because they are presumed to cause a threat to the Safety and Security of TDCJ staff and inmates or could possibly

interfere with the orderly operation of the institution. The only thing that is definite, is that these inmates, who, the overwhelming majority, are from disenfranchised neighborhoods that are social and economically challenged. Most all of these inmates have little to no education or vocational skills. The mass majority of these men have alcohol, drug or other forms of addictions. Most crimes can be linked back to addiction and for reasons of monetary gain. With these offenders locked behind the door of Ad Seg, not allowed to participate in the programming they most desperately need, will cause them to miss out on any chance of rehabilitation, all because they are deemed to pose a **POTENTIAL** threat to the TDCJ institution.

In the words the TDCJ-STG plan "FOREWORD", written by William Stephens, Director of Correctional Institutions Divisions":

"To proactively identify, effectively monitor, and efficiently manage offender groups and their members who pose a **POTENTIAL** threat to the safety and security to TDCJ staff, offenders and public, through targeting intelligence collection and analysis as well as timely dissemination of appropriate information"

In this FOREWORD in the TDCJ-STG plan, the director acknowledges and admits that the inmates only pose a **POTENTIAL** threat. He further talks of the Safety and Security of the Public, but does not address that actions to protect the Public, are not taken, by providing these inmates the same opportunities to rehabilitate, as other offenders. After all, this is the Director of the **CORRECTIONAL** Institutional Division, whose job it is, to **CORRECT** criminal behavior. This process only safeguards TDCJ staff and the institution's liability for the protection of the other inmates remanded to the custody of TDCJ, from a **POTENTIAL** threat.

Recidivism Reduction programs are paid for, with tax revenue, by the State of Texas, from the Public, for their Safety. TDCJ has long neglected to use these provisions, that have been allocated for these purposes, to rehabilitate these individuals to lower the Recidivism rate and give these inmates a chance to return to the public, to become, once again, productive members of society.

There has always been opposition, for any kind of prison reform and/or prisoner's rights movements, from prison unions. In the past, prison unions have usually been obstacles, on topics like reform of solitary confinement. However, times have changed and ideas have been replaced with more common sense advise like, if you lock a dog in a cage long enough, when you let him out, he is going to bite you. There has been support of ending this form of housing, for some time. In January of 2014, the President of the largest CORRECTIONAL Union in Texas stated in a letter obtained by the Dallas Observer, from the American Federation of State, County and Municipal Employees (AFSCME) Local 3807 President Lance Lowry wrote, "As the President of the largest CORRECTIONAL professional organization in Texas, I am calling on the Texas Department of Criminal Justice to change the death row plan, of restrictive housing, to positively impact both the Correctional staff and offenders on death row." He later bolstered arguments against solitary confinement that extend beyond just death row inmates. From the Union's perspective, Restrictive Housing increases the risk to the TDCJ staff because this type of housing tends to foster violence. The union argues that when an inmate spends 23 hours a day in a cell and has little to no privileges to lose, the staff become easy targets.

So, even though the State's largest CORRECTIONAL union has different interests in ending this practice, the growing consensus is the same. By placing these men in this situation holds a negative impact on the inmate. TDCJ has failed to rehabilitate the inmate because they are presumed to possibly pose a **POTENTIAL** threat to the TDCJ-CID Security of its institutions.

## CONCLUSION

While an offender is incarcerated, they have the chance to change their life. Programs are offered to the inmate, with the attempt to "PROGRAM" the ideology, that is in the curriculum, to help **CORRECT** criminal behavior, treat drug addiction, treat mental illness, and/or give the inmate

educational and vocational training opportunities. After all, this is the meaning of the CORRECTIONAL idea.

Rehabilitating inmates is in the best interest of Public Safety. When the offender has the opportunity to correct the behavior that, ultimately, led them to prison, this lowers the risk of the offender recidivating, by committing another crime against humanity.

While this is, supposed to be, the primary goal of the Texas Department of Criminal Justice, there is also the moral reasoning in offering the tools that could change the inmate's life.

There is a very diverse makeup of the prison population. There are all races, religions, cultures, ethnicities, and ideologies in the prison inmate community, in TDCJ. The most common thing that is shared amongst them is that the mass majority of the offenders were raised in social economically challenged neighborhoods.

Disenfranchised communities often times produce high levels of alcoholism, drug addiction and poor educational opportunities. Statistics have shown that little to no education often leads to idleness and poor work ethics. Less employment opportunities lowers the chance, for someone from a frugal background, to become proficient in a career, and often times, they turn to crime. An upbringing in this type of environment can lead to extreme depression and low self-esteem. This can cause an antisocial disorder, which is the leading mental health enigma that plagues the inmate population.

Individuals raised under these circumstances hold a higher probability of joining a gang/organization/group. There is no difference in a student, from the other end of the class spectrum, joining a fraternity while at university. There's not much difference. They are both life time commitments, there is a prospect period, an initiation and a consummation of membership, rather if it's a hazing or committing a crime. The only difference is criminal view point. While in

a fraternity, the members will lie for one another, fight for one another, steal for the greater good of the house and cover up crimes for one another if need be. The same goes for being a member of a gang. While a person may understand the difference between right and wrong, there is a greater chance that a more serious crime will be viewed liberally, in a high crime area. The majority of Americans can't fathom the thought of committing a serious crime, nor associate with those that have. However, what if that person is your father or your mother or your sibling, friend, neighbor or child? You know the good in them, the love, the compassion. So, when a person knows the good in someone, it's really hard to associate with the bad in them. Often times a child will follow their father into a trade, careers or even an organization, rather if it is a fraternity or a gang. A father from an upper middle-class family, will most likely, lead his children into a career and possibly an organization, like a fraternity. A father from a low-income area, with a criminal background has a greater chance of leading his children into criminal activity or even into a gang. This action creates Generational Criminality.

Generational Criminality happens when the mentors, who guide the younger generations, possess a criminal way of thinking and who are currently or have been engaged with criminal activity, creating a greater risk of steering the youths into criminal behavior. The overwhelming majority of these individuals do not have a sinister intention, nor, in most cases, do they intentionally teach the illicit conduct directly.

Role models can come from all sorts of unsuspecting circumstances. They are usually an adolescence's parent, sibling or other family members. However, people tend to gravitate towards successful individuals. It is often assumed that success, in a low-income community, is rooted in crime. This is often the case, but not always. When a young person sees nice things, like a nice car or clothing, jewelry etc. they want the same for themselves, so they mimic the person's action and

start trying to fall into their path, however, this can sometimes be the path to crime. The successful individual or "role model" can be a family member, a family friend or just someone from the neighborhood and they don't always realize they are held in such a "model" capacity. Again, most Americans would never view someone who commits crime, as a mentor, or someone to look up to. There is a common ideological view, that is so often shared amongst a large portion of communities, who are riddled with high levels of poverty, is that criminal activity is justified by means of survival, as long as the crime don't affect their community, directly. This is a common belief that is represented by those who feel they have no alternatives, due to lack of educational and vocational skills and less opportunities to join a career field. They are often from disrupted nuclear families, whose father, mother or in some common cases, neither parent is present. With no family values and being from a poor upbringing, and no one to look up to, this conglomerate of ingredients, creates a recipe for an imminent threat of failure and a path to a life of criminal activity.

Blessings, also, can come from unsuspecting circumstances. During an inmate's term of incarceration, opportunities are exhibited that proffer the chance of rehabilitation. The mass amount of crimes committed are addiction related charges. Rather if it's drug trafficking, manufacturing, possession, DUI or any other types of offenses that are, considered, addiction-based crimes. No matter the addiction: Alcoholism, Drug addiction or even if an inmate's addiction is sex, if the offender is housed in Restrictive Housing, they lose any chance at finding the blessing that can be found in this unsuspecting circumstance, which is prison.

Rehabilitating an inmate not only affects that individual directly, but is also very beneficial to the Safety of the Public and to those closest to the offender. It is not uncommon for an inmate to go to prison and earn their GED or receive, college credited, certificate of completion, for a

vocational training course, and be the first person in their family to earn a degree, of any kind. By identifying and addressing the inmate's addiction, through treatment programs and offering to train them in a proficient trade and allowing them to earn a GED, is a catalyst for an alternative lifestyle. By addressing their addiction, they can admit they have a problem and utilize the tools, that are made available, to help correct their addictive personality. Giving the offender the opportunity to learn a vocational skill, gives them an alternate path to make a legal living. Continuing adult education gives the inmate a chance to procure their GED and other classes such as Resume Building, Parenting, Typing Skills etc.... these courses bestows a boost of confidence, in the offender, as they plan to re-enter the work force, upon release. Without these courses and opportunities, nothing in the inmate's life has changed. With these courses they have an opportunity to change their lives and the lives of those around them, even if it's just a kid from the neighborhood. Offering the inmate these opportunities, lowers the risk that they will reoffend and can create an open to show the younger generation that a different path is possible.

With an inmate labeled as an STG, he is automatically placed in Restrictive Housing and not offered a chance to obtain a GED, take a vocational training or any sort of treatment programs for mental health or addiction, which is what, most likely, led them to prison. No opportunity is offered for the inmate to change his life, in ways that could lead to prosperity for them and those closest to them. This form of castigation is cheating the offender out of their chance of rehabilitation. Denying these inmates, the same opportunities as the rest of the prison population severely undermines the image of CORRECTIONS, to disencumber criminal thinking.

Given this time in the United States when there is a National call for prison reform, reimagining policing in America and dismantling the institutions of the Criminal Justice system, we need to recognize this is not an issue of race, this is not an issue of politics, this is an issue of

**Public Safety.** This is an issue that should transcend political parties and be agreed that this is a systematic failure that has perpetuated that past four decades of decline. Thousands of inmates have been housed in these conditions and have been refused the tools to address their individual needs. It is impossible to even start to imagine how many lives have been negatively impacted, directly or indirectly, by this conspicuously horrible practice. Thousands of lives have missed the change that these rehabilitative programs could have presented. For what reason? Because these inmates could pose a **POTENTIAL** threat to the security to an institution, that is run by staff that has been trained in the orderly operations of the institution and security and prevention tactics? This is not a valid justification for this cruel policy.

Instead, the Public has paid the price for the Texas Department of Criminal Justice's **NEGLIGENCE**, for decades, with the money, the blood and the tears of the State's Citizens, who pay for the institution and the training for **THEIR SAFETY**. Every crime that is committed, by an inmate, who has been released after years of being locked in a 6'x10' cell 23 hours a day - by themselves - no contact visits - no chance at rehabilitation - being dehumanized and emasculated, just to be released back to society, leavened with hate for years of this punitive treatment, is a testament to the failure of the Texas Department of Criminal Justice's primary commitment and cause of the institutional founding, **PUBLIC SAFETY!**

The risks posed by the Texas Department of Criminal Justice policy exceeds the benefits it has deemed these inmates to pose as a **POTENTIAL** threat to the security of its **OWN INSTITUTION**. This policy and has ignored the damage caused by this incognizable procedure that has been exercised for nearly four decades.

This discriminatory policy must be abolished immediately. The courts have not listened to the constitutional violations or complaints from the offenders or their families over the years of

litigation. The only prospect for change is the Texas State legislation which must ban TDCJ from this cruel and unusual punitive treatment. The impact of this antiquated policy results in a waste of life, monetary resources and opportunities to program the effects of the rehabilitative alternatives to the offender and could conceivably spread these surrogate life choices to the younger generation.

Can you be the voice that will be heard? Will you be the voice for those that can't be heard? What about the child's voice who has never physically touched their parent, solely because an agency has deemed them a **POTENTIAL** threat to their institution. Isn't that punishment before a rule has been broken? Will you be the voice that asks the Texas Department of Criminal Justice **CORRECTIONAL** Institutional Division, why are they trading the **SAFETY** of the **PUBLIC** for that of its **OWN SECURITY**? Will you be the person to demand the Texas Department of Criminal Justice to stop selling **PUBLIC SAFETY** to protect the security of their **OWN INSTITUTION**, from a **POTENTIAL** threat?

Experience has proven that there is no need to place inmates designated as "members" of a Security Threat Group in restrictive housing for the duration of their sentence. The Federal Bureau of Prisons has proven this and can offer an alternative solution to an outdated harsh practice that adversely impacts Public Safety as well as Prison Staff.