

OPEN LETTER 2014

Greetings from Texas infamous death row. the recent movement by the guards union president AFSCME Texas Correctional Employees Local 3807 has brought attention of the media to the current dismal conditions on texas death row.

The Texas Tribune picked up the story based on Union president lance lowry letter to texas Dept. Criminal justice wherein he called for changes, as Lance layed out the truth, based on the facts;

JANUARY 20, 2014

"calling on the Tx Dept. Crim. justice to change the death row plan to positively impact both the correctional staff and offenders on texas death row. After the November 1998 escape of offender martin Gurule, TDCJ engaged in a knee jerk reaction regarding the administration of death row inmates.

Staff incompetency and lack of proper security equipment were the biggest factors resulting in Gurule's escape from the Ellis Unit death row. As a result of the escape the agency ignored the root of the problem and addressed the lack of security equipment by increasing the physical perimeter security, in addition to the number of firearm rounds issued to perimeter pickets. lack of staff competency was never addressed in a positive manner and has resulted in a less experienced firece securing Texas death row.

the changes in the death row plan following the Gurule escape have resulted in the solitary confinement housing of D1 offenders who were work capable and had privilages which could be used as management tools for negative behaviour. As a result of the changes to the texas death row plan, inmates have very few privilages to loose and staff become an easy target.

the texas death row plan needs to address tools that can manage positive behaviour. D1 offenders who are work capable should be utilised. Housing D1 offenders in a solitary cell is a waist of valuable security personel and money. D1 offenders should be housed 2 offenders to a cell and treated similar to G3 offenders in terms of privilages such as work assignment and allowed TV privilages by streaming over the air television to a computer tablet using a closed WiFi network. Use of technologies such as computer tablets and streaming of TV should be offered to offenders who exhibit positive behaviour. Lack of visual or Audio stimulations result in increased psychological incidents and result in costly crisis management. Staff incompetency should be addressed by offering death row officers a salary differential and substantially increase their training for staff comitted to working death row. A greater pay diferential will insure we have the best officers watching Texas most dangerous population. Other correctional agencies have sucessfully used differentials to address staffing issues. Lets make texas a model for sucessful death row criminal justice reform."

Respectfully, lance lowry
President Local 3807

The convicts on the row endorce this movement to bring positive change. having been at the ellis one unit, witnessing the positive enviroment we had, this letter speaks volumes to the deplorable conditions we now live under.

Recently TDCJ began housing G3 general population offenders on B pod death row. 6 sections per pod; 5 are death row, one is G3. Personaly watching these men have group recreation on our yards, siting in the dayroom at the table playing chess, dominos, watching the super bowl as a group of men cheering... reminds us all of what we lost 14 years ago when moved here from Ellis. Death row was G3. we had all the privilages aforementioned. Nobody was murdered, no problems ocured on a day to day basis. Normal operations went smoothly at Ellis. Work program, group rec on the yards, Tv's, we played hand ball, basketball, vollyball. our physical health was alot better as well as our mental state. With the budget cuts things on the row have only got worse each year since the first round of cuts in 2003.

The psychological effects of prolonged solitary confinement have adverse negative effects on every single one of us. Having been housed in this dismal environment for 14 years I have witnessed men's mental health degrade to insanity.

I alone have taken notice my memory is effected, my thinking process gets effected by the sensory deprivation. I lose the simplest things like the name of a song, I wish to tell someone later if they heard this new song...but the name of the band/song escapes me. This was the first sign of the effects of the onset of death row syndrome. Solitary housing is a form of mental torture that we have just begun to study and fully understand.

Several people who have endured long term solitary - to be released free - later went public with the cause and effect of what they now cope with on a day to day basis. On a most primal basic human level - they can not be in large crowds, having human contact with people now makes them nervous and uncomfortable. They are in a way psychologically scared for life.

Our Constitution's 8th amendment prohibits cruel and unusual punishment; In prisons across the nation it is ongoing to this day. Human beings housed like caged animals when it is not needed. With the technology we have today. The use of alternative forms of behaviour modification should be the focus. Not the old dungeon draconian punishment of lock 'em up toss away the key.

Question is - can Texas get in tune with the times, find the key, set the mold make positive changes for the humanity of its prisoners on the row. The death penalty debate - is for another time/venue. Change is what is needed now.

60 Minutes did a story on the federal system and how its de-segregating its own ad. seg. isolation lock up. This director was in charge of Mississippi and he changed their system - down sized its solitary with great success! He then went to work for the federal dept. bureau of prisons. Hope is alive for us all as Mississippi is within the 5th circuit - the federal body of courts that had full oversight over Texas what they do.