

**Virtual Press Conference -- Deadly Heat in Texas Prisons: Advocacy Organizations and Corrections Leaders
Join Legal Battle to Save Lives as Summer Descends on Texas**

EMBARGOED UNTIL: Monday, APRIL 22 AT 12:00 P.M. CDT

Media Contacts:

Dr. Amite Dominick (amite.D@85toStayAlive.org)

Erica Grossman (Erica@hheglaw.com)

Jeff Edwards (Jeff@edwards-law.com)

Virtual Press Conference - Monday, April 22, 2024, at 2:30 PM CDT

Zoom Link: <https://wtotrial.zoom.us/j/96747211860?pwd=VTM1THFHbmhGbVNoQmxoYkIIN3RzQT09>

Texas prisoners are being cooked to death. As alleged in our complaint, approximately 85,000 of the 130,000 individuals incarcerated in Texas prisons currently lack air conditioning in their living areas. Hundreds have died and suffered serious heat-related illnesses because of the sweltering temperatures in Texas prisons.

Texas's torturous heat conditions have been consistently cited as cruel and unusual punishment by multiple human rights organizations, the U.S. Department of Justice, the U.S. Congress, members of the Texas Legislature, correctional staff, doctors, and courts. Extreme temperatures are inhumane, a violation of 8th Amendment rights, deadly, and affect the health and mental well-being of all who live and work in Texas prisons.

Last year, Texas lawyer Jodi Cole had to fight to save Bernie Tiede's life in court, because the Texas Department of Criminal Justice refused to provide him air-conditioned housing, insisting on keeping this 65-year-old man in relentless triple-digit temperatures. But tens of thousands of lives of those incarcerated still remain at risk.

Today, numerous organizations advocating for the rights of incarcerated people join the cause by filing an amended complaint to declare TDCJ's prison policy unconstitutional and to order that Texas prisons be kept at safe temperatures—specifically, below 85 degrees. For nearly 30 years, Texas jails have been kept under 85 degrees. Our lawsuit asks the court to order that TDCJ facilities be required to do the same.

Last summer went down as the second hottest ever in Texas, just behind 2011. According to the Texas Attorney General's Custodial Death Reports, over a hundred people died in Texas prisons during that time. Based on the scientific research and past summers (before TDCJ stopped tracking heat-related deaths), many of those deaths were likely heat-related.

Our complaint expands the suit that Bernie filed against TDCJ and Texas Attorney General Ken Paxton in September 2023. The 2011 movie "Bernie" by acclaimed filmmaker Richard Linklater featured Bernie's story—Jack Black played Bernie and Matthew McConaughey played prosecutor Danny Buck Davidson. Last year, Linklater created videos of Bernie talking about oppressive prison heat and will be speaking at the conference.

The lawsuit follows several unsuccessful efforts in the state legislature to require Texas prisons to maintain safe temperatures. A bill that proposed installing air conditioning in state prisons passed the Texas House and died in the Senate.

"Letting people suffer or die in prisons because of dangerous temperatures disregards our basic humanity," says Dean Williams, who previously served as Executive Director of the Colorado Department of Corrections and commissioner of the Alaska Department of Corrections. "Cooling prisons to safe temperatures . . . is the only long-term solution that does not compromise the safety and lives of prisoners and staff."

The plaintiffs are represented by Edwards Law, Holland, Holland Edwards & Grossman LLC, the Law Office of Jodi Cole, Wheeler Trigg O'Donnell LLP, and Winston & Strawn LLP.

WHEN: Monday, April 22, 2024, at 2:30 PM Central Time

WHERE: By Zoom – please use this link to join:

<https://wtotrial.zoom.us/j/96747211860?pwd=VTM1THFHbmhGbVNoQmxoYkllIN3RzQT09>

WHO:

- Texas House Representative Carl O. Sherman
- Director Richard Linklater
- Dr. Amite Dominick (Texas Prison Community Advocates)
- Marci Marie (Lioness Member and TikTok Influencer)
- Professor Ariel Dulitzky (UT Austin Human Rights Clinic)
- Professor Michele Deitch (Prison and Jail Innovation Lab, University of Texas)
- Jeff Edwards (Edwards Law)
- Cynthia Simons (Director of Women's Justice, TCJE)
- Janet Delk (Impacted Family Member)
- Dr. Julie Skarha (Brown University)
- Erica Grossman (Holland, Holland Edwards & Grossman)

###

Organizational Plaintiffs:

- [Texas Prisons Community Advocates](#)
- [Lioness Justice Impacted Women's Alliance](#)
- [Coalition of Texans with Disabilities](#)
- [Texas C.U.R.E.](#)

Law Firms:

- [Edwards Law](#)
- [Holland, Holland Edwards & Grossman, LLC](#)
- [Law Office of Jodi Cole](#)
- [Wheeler Trigg O'Donnell LLP](#)
- [Winston & Strawn LLP](#)