



# HEAR FROM HER

## Laurie Pherigo

**System-Impacted Women Speak Series  
Brought to you by the Texas Criminal Justice Coalition**

I would estimate that well over 90% of the women I knew in TDCJ had experienced some form of trauma, whether it was domestic violence, sexual assault as a child or adult – or both. For these women the very environment and culture in prison is traumatic, daily. The guards scream at you. The dorms are deafeningly loud. There are ways you can respond to this trauma, but it never really goes away.

The lack of approved physical contact in prison is very damaging to women, specifically. I understand the blanket prohibition and that the prisons are – at least ostensibly – trying to reduce cases of sexual assault. I support them in that goal. But I also believe that women need physical contact for our emotional health. Being able to hold hands as you pray, or giving a hug at the end of a class, is so important.

The incarceration of women makes virtual orphans of thousands upon thousands of children. Like it or not, a vast majority of women who are incarcerated are mothers, and it is all too common for their children to have nowhere to go. Wherever those children live, they are much more likely to have emotional or behavioral problems, and all too often they are part of the school-to-prison pipeline.



I volunteer with a local organization, Truth Be Told, and in that capacity I have written a curriculum for a class that helps prepare the women for reentry. I have facilitated this class at the Lockhart Correctional Facility since 2017. This work is some of the most satisfying I have ever done. I was also a part of the Dignity campaign in the 2019 legislative session, which successfully passed eight women's justice bills.

**?** What are you looking forward to most in the future?

**Watching my grandchildren grow into the amazing adults they're on their way to becoming, and experiencing with them the magic of life. Growing old with my wife. Simple things, mostly. In many ways the future has become a scary place. I worry about what kind of world my grandchildren will inherit. So I will do everything I possibly can to make sure that we make it the right world.**

**For more information about women in Texas' justice system, visit [TexasCJC.org/Womens-Justice](https://TexasCJC.org/Womens-Justice)**