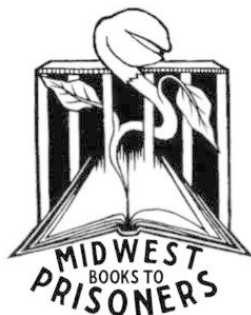




*“There is a gulf between the image and the reality of the punishment bureaucracy. Copaganda creates that gulf. It is the system of government and news media propaganda that promotes mass incarceration, justifies the barbarities and profits that accompany it, and distorts our sense of what threatens us and what keeps us safe”. – Alec Karakatsanis, “Copaganda”*

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**Midwest Books to Prisoners**  
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Midwest Books to Prisoners shares reading materials with people behind bars free of charge. We fight to undermine the lack of access to communication and education while amplifying voices the system silences by helping people self-publish their works as zines. We host open meetups twice a week to answer letters and pack books. Get involved!



Prison censorship is a front in the fascist american project. For the millions buried by the largest prison system on the planet, we know that access to communication and reading materials remain one of the only ways people behind bars can maintain humanity. Prison is censorship, a system of walls and borders that criminalizes people and ideas: a system we are determined to break by building bridges of solidarity - through sharing books and publishing zines.

Coinciding with the fascistic expansion of police and cop city projects, the prison censorship machine has rapidly marched on, consuming the majority of local, state and federal facilities. Played-out "war on drugs" fear mongering is why most people behind bars no longer receive physical mail: books are banned under cover of "content-neutral" and "publisher-only" restrictions, and private monopolies experiment with dystopian tablet technologies to monitor and profit from all communications.

Illinois has been one of the last holdouts until last year when prison copagandists began another all-too-familiar disinformation campaign. Guards are staging drug exposure hospitalization stunts to take away physical mail - incidents easily disproved as impossible by medical experts and according to IDOC's own confiscation and exposure data. Unlike other states, this battle is being waged at capitol: multiple bills for and against mail scanning are being debated in Springfield. IDOC has not made any announcements yet, but has signed a new phone/email/tablet contract with ICSolutions: Illinois could fall to all-digital mail unless we organize now to stop it.

One voice that has not been heard from are those behind bars who are bearing the brunt of their draconian machinations. We made sure to share their plans to thousands of our incarcerated correspondents throughout IDOC, asking for comments and strategies on how to fight back and providing information on the bills and the addresses to write congress. Throughout these pages you'll hear directly how mail censorship affects life behind bars: and special appreciations to the brave souls writing us, refusing to be silenced.

**We are determined to stop mail scanning and book bans in Illinois:** we share these tools and updates, seeking comrades to help break down the panopticon through underground networks of paper and print. *Free the books, free the mail, free the people - free them all!*



Alan Piwowar

# Stop Mail Scanning in Illinois

By Anthony Ehlers

In the spring, the Illinois House is set to take up a bill aimed at turning all prisons in the State of Illinois Paperless. This is all coming from Republican Legislators and AFSCME, the correctional officers union. These new rules will ban all mail from private individuals until it is digitized; it will also ban books and newspapers.

Why would they do this? Ostensibly, they will tell you that it is necessary in the name of public safety: keeping IDOC and its employees and residents safe.

One of the things that happened in the wake of legalizing marijuana is that a lot of synthetic cannabinoid products are being produced. This is part of the cannabis market that is largely unregulated. One of the products that has come forward is called K2. It is a synthetic form of cannabinoid that will still get you high without the form of THC in regular marijuana. K2 is widely sold in gas stations among other places. K2 gets sprayed on paper and these pieces of paper are either eaten or smoked, and that's how prisoners get high. They cut them into small pieces called "strips". This is part of the excuse that AFSCME and the Republican Legislators use for wanting to implement the Paperless prison system.

The other reason that is put forth is that it is needed for the safety of correctional officers who handle the mail. There have been numerous reports in local and nationwide media about officers in mailrooms in prisons throughout the country who have been made sick or died due to drug soaked paper and things like that. There was one here in the State of Illinois that made the news at a downstate prison called Shawnee Correctional Center. Six correctional officers and two prisoners "experienced medical symptoms" while sorting mail. The prison was put on lockdown: mailrooms across the state were alerted, and all mail in that prison was temporarily stopped.

This sounds like a reasonable response, right? However, the Hazardous Material team that responded to the prison found no drugs on any paper, nor on the clothes of the officers. There is no evidence of any drugs or contraband being found causing a medical emergency.

They use generic terms like what was reported on WSIL TV about an incident in Menard Correctional Center in September of 2024. Part of the report says "One staff from the mailroom started exhibiting symptoms", it goes on: "Another employee exhibited symptoms and was taken to the hospital". Exhibiting symptoms? Symptoms of what? The report goes on to say that "All impacted staff were treated and released". You know what that means? It means they were politely told 'nothing is wrong with you, you can go'.

It was reported in "The Southern" that in August of 2024 "two officers had an elevated heart rate and dizziness after having responded to an inmate medical situation where possible overdose was suspected". An elevated heart rate and dizziness after responding to an emergency

medical situation? That seems like a normal reaction to me. They are instead trying to tie it to a possible drug contamination without any evidence at all.

They use these generic terms like “exhibiting symptoms” and trying to tie every situation to drugs in order to further their narrative. The sad truth is they treat every medical emergency like a drug overdose no matter who it is.

In June of 2024, at Stateville Correctional Center, my friend who lived next door to me named Michael Broadway, had such a medical emergency. It took 20 minutes for the nurse to show up to his cell. When she got there, all she wanted to do was hit him with Narcan. When the first one didn't work, she hit him again. The IDOC said Michael died of a drug overdose, however, the autopsy showed that he died of an Asthma attack exacerbated by extreme heat. His family is now suing IDOC.

Nowhere in the State of Illinois has there been an incident of a corrections worker being made sick or dying of any drug soaked paper. Even holding, or touching the deadly drug Fentanyl will not result in overdosing or being made sick. Touching or holding the drug does not harm you. It is a narrative that AFSCME keeps pushing, but it simply isn't true.

These synthetic drugs aren't as dangerous as they are being made out to be. How do I know? For the last 23 years I was in Stateville Correctional Center before it closed in October. Strips, as they were called, had permeated the prison. Some guy did get caught, and they were punished. But mostly, prison staff didn't seem to care much. Many guys smoked these drugs; you could smell the smoke in the air all the time.

This wasn't a problem the prison cared to address. Prisons are mostly concerned with prisoner violence, either violence towards each other or violence towards staff. As long as guys weren't doing those things, they didn't care if prisoners smoked themselves into oblivion. I don't smoke or get high, but I was always around it, and was forced to breathe in secondhand smoke in these enclosed spaces. I never “exhibited symptoms”, whatever that means, and neither did any of the countless other prisoners who were around it, or who did it, nor did any of the correctional officers who were around it.



*Prison guards with AFSCME picketing in corn fields demanding an end to physical mail*

## IDOC planning mail changes following drug exposure increase in prisons



## Southern Illinois Lawmakers Urge IDOC to Temporarily Stop Mail at Correctional Facilities

By Mike Mulhondo Sep 24, 2024 Updated Sep 24, 2024 6



Going paperless is costly, and simply does not work. In 2020, the Wisconsin Department of Corrections began sending all prisoner mail to a company called TextBehind in Maryland that scans the mail and sends a digital copy to prisoners. This costs the Wisconsin Department of Corrections over \$1 million a year. Doing this for IDOC will needlessly cost taxpayers millions of dollars.

There is evidence as well to show that going paperless does not work. WisconsinWatch.org reported that in the year 2021, the year Wisconsin began restricting mail, there were 49 incidents of drugs being found on paper. Thus far in 2024, there have been 55 incidents. A Marshall Project investigation from 2021 found that restricting mail did not curb drugs found in Texas prisons. The Patriot News reported last year that after banning physical mail in 2018, the number of Pennsylvania prisoners who tested positive on random drug tests substantially increased.

Do you want to know why going paperless and restricting mail doesn't work? Because most drugs are brought into the prison by the people who work here. In Stateville, staff were routinely walked out and fired for bringing in drugs, selling cell phones, or having sex with prisoners.

In Cook County Jail last January, a nurse was arrested for bringing in drug soaked paper to her prisoner boyfriend. In March, a CCJ commissary worker with a private company was arrested trying to smuggle in drugs.

In 2023 in Wisconsin, prosecutors charged nine Waupun prison workers, including a former warden, in a federally investigated staff smuggling ring. I can tell you from experience that many staff members in Stateville, both correctional officers and other staff, have been caught smuggling things into the prison.

Make no mistake, this paperless agenda will affect more than a prisoner's personal letters. It will also stop prisoners from being able to purchase books or magazines, even newspapers. IDOC has already severely curtailed our ability to get books. Everyone knows that buying used books is cheaper than buying new books. However, IDOC has employed a policy that will not allow in any books with highlighted passages, underlined sentences, or stains of any kind. This seriously limits your ability to get used books, forcing you (or your family) to spend money on new books. Sadly, not everyone can afford to purchase new books. The drugs they claim to be trying to stop aren't highlighted or underlined, so these restrictions make little sense other than trying to stop books from coming in at all.

Books are a huge part of the prison culture: good books, both fiction and non-fiction, are passed around. You whittle away the hours in a place like



this, and many men do that by reading. Once I set my mind to try to become a better person, I read anything and everything I could get my hands on. Reading books helped me to get on a better path: they helped me grow and become self-rehabilitated. Some books are so valuable in prison, I've seen them used as currency. That's how valuable books can be in a place like this, and they are trying to take that away.

Some men in this place also write books. I myself have been writing a book. Other men, like my friend Michael Broadway who died, are already published authors. He wrote and self-published a semi-autobiographical book about growing up in Chicago called "One Foot In". Other guys have published poetry books or memoirs. This bill would stop all of that. You would stop incarcerated men and women from becoming better people. Worse yet, you would stop them from expressing themselves.

This will also hugely impact education and learning in prison. IDOC does not have any higher learning or a degree bearing education. Many men take correspondence courses such as Blackstone Career Institute which upon completion certifies men and women as paralegals anywhere in the country. There are also various colleges and Universities across the country that offer correspondence courses like Adams State or the University of Colorado at Pueblo. If this bill passes, none of these things will be available to the men and women in IDOC anymore.

It is not just limited to correspondence courses either. There are higher education programs scattered across the state like the Northwestern Prison Education Program (NPEP), or Lewis University. These programs largely rely on paper printed articles instead of books. NPEP is largely funded by donations and grants: it would cost thousands of dollars to pay for course books for everyone. Many of the course materials are printed. This would also stop. The guys in these programs would not be able to do their coursework. It would have the effect of shutting down higher education in prison. Is that really in the interest of public safety?

We have been able to purchase tablets through a company called Global Tel-Link (GTL). The tablets have apps for music, news and podcasts, which you have to pay a subscription or. It also has emails which you also pay o, and ebooks which are free .The reason that the book app is free is because they are all public domain materials which are older than 70 years. That means any science of any kind is old and no longer applies. There is no recent history, no self-help books, or anything that is contemporary.

You know what the tablet does not have? It does not have the ability to hold any writing whatsoever, other than a 2000 character email. You cannot write letters, poems, songs, or books. You cannot write your school papers or your own legal motions. It doesn't even spellcheck. Nor can it hold pictures or drawings that small children do for their parents. You cannot create art on it. If this bill passes, you cannot even use paper to draw or paint.

Moira Marquis of PEN America said "If you are going to limit somebody's First Amendment rights excessively, you really should have a very strong burden of proof that not only is this necessary, but also effective." This is neither necessary nor effective: this is IDOC blaming families and the people they incarcerate for the problems their staff can't or won't address.



## ***Restore Justice at the Capitol campaigning with legislators to protect physical mail as well as youth sentencing reforms***

House Bill 3713 introduced by Rep. Laura Faver Dias would require prisoners receive the physical, original mail, that communication cannot be restricted for disciplinary reasons, require emails and calls to be free of charge, and require that IDOC collect comprehensive data on all drug confiscations.

Illinois Senate Republican Terri Bryant, a former 20 year IDOC guard, is leading the disinformation charge, performatively surprise visiting prisons and introducing legislation demanding an end to physical mail. Her proposed SB1641 requires "100% scanning capacity" within "one year". House GOP David Friess, Tony McCombie and Patrick Windhorst also proposed a second law HB5893 which also requires all mail to be scanned and delivered on tablets or kiosks, but this bill never passed during the last session.



**David Friess**  
House primary sponsor  
(R - 115)



**Tony M. McCombie**  
cosponsor  
(R - 89)



**Patrick Windhorst**  
cosponsor  
(R - 117)

Terri Bryant is also asking guards to break sanctuary state policy and report undocumented people as they end their IDOC sentence: "Staff are prohibited from notifying or cooperating with ICE so no way for ICE to know the offender is incarcerated,... If you are IDOC staff who wants ICE to know of an illegal immigrant in IDOC, call or message me.... I won't rat you out. I will notify ICE"



State Senator Jason Plummer and Terri Bryant demanded Latoya Hughes step down as IDOC Director, grilling her during her confirmation hearing: "Are we going to have a system in place - mail scanning or whatever - to stop the synthetics that are flooding our facilities, harming our correctional staff, and harming our inmates at the facility?" Latoya Hughes responded vaguely: "We're in conversations with our union partners related specifically to your question, related to mail and mail scanning. We are working with them on a comprehensive approach".

# Dear IDOC Director Hughes,

We, the undersigned community, legal, and policy organizations, on behalf of our members, are writing to you in light of calls to suspend delivery or electronically scan incoming mail for people who are incarcerated in the Illinois Department of Corrections (IDOC), to convey our complete opposition to any action that would temporarily or permanently halt the processing and delivery of original, physical mail to people who are incarcerated.

Ensuring the safety of the people who live and work in IDOC is vital. Restricting the mail or replacing it with mail scanning will not increase their safety. In other states, replacing physical mail with mail scanning did not reduce overdoses or drug use in prisons; in some cases, the rate of overdoses and drug use increased. There is no evidence that suspending or banning the delivery of physical mail to people who are incarcerated provides any institutional safety benefits.

Letters, cards, drawings, books, and photographs sent in the mail are treasured forms of communication for people who are incarcerated and their loved ones on the outside. Maintaining close relationships with one's support system during incarceration promotes rehabilitation and improves post-release outcomes, making all of us safer. Mail is essential to maintaining a sense of hope and connection, and restricting it has measurable negative impacts on mental health, behavior, and success when people return home. Digital replications are often low quality and incomplete, and physical letters offer a personal connection that cannot be replaced by digital means.

Medical and toxicology experts have routinely debunked claims that a person can have significant drug exposure or overdose by simply handling something like drug-soaked papers or even powder fentanyl. The risks to staff when handling mail are low, especially with personal protective equipment, and the alleged claims that are circulating about drugs entering prisons through the mail have not been verified. There is no publicly available data or evidence related to how illicit substances enter IDOC facilities. If there is a verifiable substance use problem, the evidence-based way to solve it is to address the root of the problem through comprehensive substance use disorder treatment for people who are impacted by it during their incarceration.

**We urge you not to suspend the delivery of original mail or replace it with mail scanning. Instead, please explore evidence-based solutions that foster safety, rehabilitation, and connection instead of restricting access to this indispensable lifeline.**

Thank you for your consideration of this important issue.

Access Living  
ACLU-Illinois  
Alliance for Higher Education in Prison  
Art from the Heart  
Build Communities Not Prisons  
Cabrin Green Legal Aid  
Catholic Lawyers Guild  
Challenge II Change  
Chicago 400 Alliance  
Chicago Alliance Against Sexual Exploitation (CAASE)  
Chicago Appleseed Center for Fair Courts  
Chicago Books to Women in Prison  
Chicago Council of Lawyers  
Chicago Lawyers' Committee for Civil Rights  
Chicago Torture Justice Center  
Chicago Votes  
Children and Family Justice Center

Children's Best Interest Project  
Education Justice Project  
FAMM  
Hinda Institute  
Illinois Alliance for Reentry and Justice, NFP  
Illinois Coalition to End Permanent Punishments  
Illinois Prison Project  
Impact for Equity  
Inside Out Network  
James B. Moran Center for Youth Advocacy  
John Howard Association  
Juvenile Justice Initiative  
Legacy Reentry Foundation  
Legal Council for Health Justice  
Liberation Library  
Live Free Illinois  
Mamas Activating Movements for Abolition & Solidarity (MAMAS)  
Metropolitan Family Services

Midwest Books to Prisoners  
Mud Theatre Project  
National Lawyers Guild - Chicago  
Our Brothers' Keepers of Southern Illinois  
Parole Illinois  
Precious Blood Ministry of Reconciliation  
Prison Policy Initiative  
Restore Justice  
Safer Foundation  
Saint Leonard's Ministries  
TASC  
Trinity United Church of Christ, Chicago  
Unitarian Universalist Advocacy Network of Illinois  
Unitarian Universalist Prison Ministry of Illinois  
Uptown People's Law Center  
Walls Turned Sideways

**It's not too late to write the IDOC director or the Governor!**

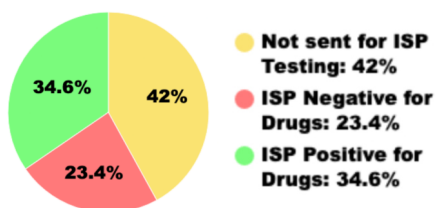
**Latoya Hughes, Director, IDOC**  
301 Concordia Court  
P.O. Box 19277  
Springfield, IL 62794-9277  
latoya.hughes@illinois.gov

Governor J.B. Pritzker  
Springfield Office of the Governor  
401 S. Spring St.  
Springfield, IL 62704  
Phone: 217-782-6830 or 217-782-6831

Chicago Office of the Governor  
555 W. Monroe St., 16th Floor  
Chicago, IL 60661  
Phone: 312-814-2121, 312-814-2122

# Mail Scamming: IDOC's Own Data Exposes how Politicians and Guard Unions are Lying about Drugs in the Mail

## 1493 drug confiscations



An all-too-familiar playbook: the media parrots press releases from prison staff without any independent investigation. Was there any evidence of these drug exposures? Hospital records or drug test results from the affected officers? Uncritical journalists and a lack of public data enables prison staff to restrict books and mail on dishonest narratives.

However, through a FOIA request, we now have datasets for all drug confiscations within IDOC from 2023-2024 and all drug exposure incidents within IDOC in 2024. This confiscation data includes the date, facility, description, location found (in mail, in cell, on person), field drug test results, whether it was sent to Illinois State Police for accurate drug testing, and the results of those tests. The exposure data contains date, time, facility, whether it was staff or a prisoner, whether Narcan was used, and whether they went to the hospital. More comprehensive statistical analysis is ongoing: we've posted the data on our website for others to review and are sharing some of our initial findings.

IDOC's data confirms that Republican politicians and prison guard unions are deliberately misleading the public about these supposed hospitalizations, inaccurately blaming books and the mail.

Out of the total 1493 alleged drug confiscations in a two year period, only 30.1% was ever found in the mail. Only 5 mailroom confiscations of Fentanyl was ever confirmed by ISP testing in this period. Of all the confiscations that ISP confirmed contained drugs, over 90% was synthetic cannabinoids or

THC/Delta, which cannot produce the overdoses or symptoms officers claim. Even with Fentanyl, medical experts repeatedly prove how it is impossible for an incidental drug reaction by simple handling of the drug (and in any case mail staff are supposed to use masks and gloves).

Their rush to confiscate or reject anything that looks suspicious has drastic consequences for the confined, especially for those currently fighting cases in court. Out of the 88 pieces of legal mail confiscated, only 40 were confirmed by ISP to have actually contained drugs: that means 48 pieces of Attorney-Client privileged mail was illegally opened, searched, copied, not given to the recipient who may have also been disciplined - all based on arbitrary suspicions and defective field tests.

Illinois uses the Sirchie Narc II for 'presumptive testing', which has been widely discredited for rampant false positives: regardless, IDOC relies on this initial testing to place people in solitary confinement, restricts communication and commissary rights, and affect good time / parole decisions. We're also thinking of the thousands of books we sent that were rejected for 'stains' or 'unusual discoloration' that were rejected without any actual drug testing whatsoever.

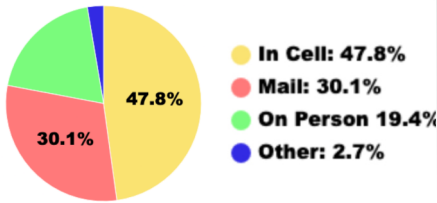
IDOC works with Illinois State Police's drug testing facility for actual drug test results: 65.6% of the confiscations either tested negative by ISP or IDOC never bothered to send it for accurate testing all.

What was not in the FOIA data was drug test results or medical diagnosis for the guards who sought hospitalization. Interestingly, the vast majority of all drug exposure incidents affecting guards occurred after July 2024. This data demonstrates that there was little to no correlation between any of these incidents and actual confirmations of drug-laced mail.

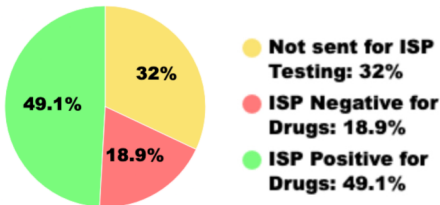
One such incident at Menard in early September where several guards were



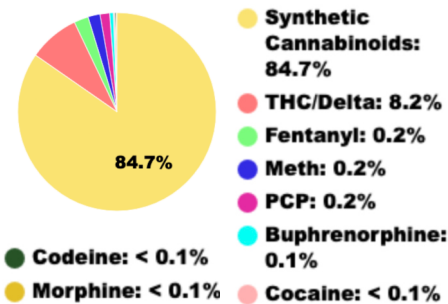
## Location Confiscated



## Of the 444 Confiscated in Mail



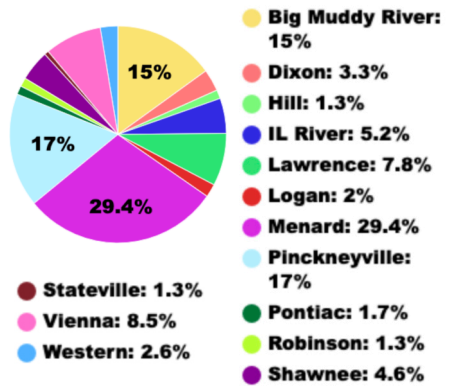
## Of the 509 ISP Confirmed Positive for Drugs



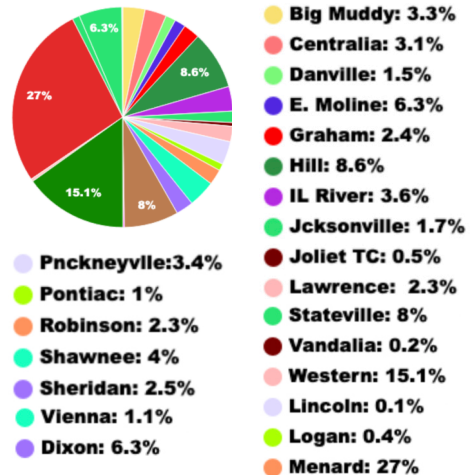
allegedly hospitalized had state senators Terri Bryant and Dan Fowler calling for an immediate suspension of all physical mail until they implement a scanning system. Read this ridiculous timeline of events out of a scifi novel:

Monday, 9/9, one staff member from the mailroom started exhibiting symptoms while opening mail and was transported to an outside hospital via ambulance. The remaining staff in the mailroom were then relocated to the facility's warehouse. While in the warehouse, another mailroom employee exhibited symptoms and was transported to an outside hospital via ambulance. Subsequently, two other staff members, who were not in the mailroom, but came in contact with the first two mailroom employees, started exhibiting symptoms and were taken to the outside hospital via ambulance. Later, one mailroom staff member reported feeling ill and was transported to an outside hospital via state

## Location of 153 Staff Exposures



## Confiscations by Institution



vehicle. Another mailroom staff member was taken to the hospital by state vehicle without symptoms for precautionary measures. All impacted staff were treated and released. A team consisting of members of the Illinois State Police (ISP), supported by members of the Illinois National Guard, were on-site to assist with testing items of concern in the mailroom. The investigation into the recent events at Menard are ongoing.

However, according to their own data, there was no drug confiscation in the mailroom at Menard on 9/9/2024. All week they put people on lockdown and sent search teams tearing up cells looking for scraps of paper. So many of these plague scare lockdowns, the data shows no results - just cops faking it.

Police and politicians are lying to justify harsh and unnecessary restrictions on the basic human right to



Illinois guards use Sirchie's Narc II field tests – so notoriously inaccurate that multiple states have ordered DOC to stop using them. A class action lawsuit against Massachusetts DOC “less accurate than witchcraft, phrenology, or simply picking a number out of a hat” creating “false positives nearly 80% of the time”.

Nonetheless: many states including Illinois continue to use Narc II for “presumptive testing” that commonly results in loss of good time, being put in solitary confinement, have communication rights restricted, and impact parole board decisions.

## ***Less Accurate than Witchcraft’: Class Action Claims Mass. DOC Uses Faulty Drug Tests on Legal Inmate Mail***

The 29-page complaint charges that the Mass. DOC uses the Narcotics Reagent Analysis Kit (NARK) II-brand tests, which are made and sold by defendants Sirchie Acquisition Company, LLC and Premier Biotech and designed to detect synthetic cannabinoids, to test for drugs sprayed on paper. The case scathes that although these tests are “less accurate than witchcraft, phrenology, or simply picking a number out of a hat,” and create false positives “almost 80% of the time, according to one DOC official’s estimate,” they produce very real consequences for proposed class members.” – ClassAction.org on Green et al. v. Massachusetts Department of Correction et al. (NARK II lawsuit in Massachusetts attesting to false positives 2021)

“They further claim that the inadequacy of the training materials Sirchie provided to the DOC all but ensured that DOC employees would underestimate the product’s flaws, misinterpret preliminary results, and make decisions adverse to inmates based on false positives” & “DOC employees allegedly attempted to dissuade him from pursuing confirmatory testing during that time. Two months later, confirmatory testing showed that the preliminary result had been a false positive. When Mr. Green finally received the tested mail, it was too damaged to read.” – Excerpt from the Opinion and Order in Green et al. v. Massachusetts Department of Correction et al.

## **Revealed: drug tests in California prisons yielded false positives, affecting thousands of people**

Records suggest Quest Diagnostics erroneously detected opiates. Lawyers say parole requests were jeopardized in the process



✎ Incarcerated women at Central California Women's Facility in Chowchilla are among thousands affected by false positives. Composite: Los Angeles Times, Smith Collection/Gado, Getty Images

Thousands of drug tests used by a major US diagnostic company in **California** **prisons** last year are suspected to have generated false positive results, an enormous error that has jeopardized the parole requests of some incarcerated people, according to civil rights lawyers and prison medical records.



## **New York punished 2,000 prisoners over false positive drug tests, report finds**

ALBANY, N.Y. (AP) - New York’s prison system unfairly punished more than 2,000 prisoners after tests of suspected contraband substances falsely tested positive for drugs, according to a NY Inspector General report. In hundreds of cases, the prisoners had committed no offense, but the flawed results were used to put them in solitary confinement, halt family visits, or cancel parole hearings.



"We have deployed 14,000 kiosks and over 356,000 Secure Devices. A million messages daily. We've delivered over 100 million songs. We have deployed over 300,000 games. We have delivered over 1,000,000 movies."

Illinois' signed a new contract is with ICSolutions for phone, "email", and tablets: the contract also offers the capability to "scan and digitally delivering the mail to the population". However, IDOC hasn't made announcements: "How this functionality will be utilized is still being determined and IDOC is committed to continued dialog with key stakeholders on this issue," says IDOC spokesperson Naomi Puzzello. We are hearing they are having trouble rolling out the new phone and tablets: people are losing access to the old GTL tablet and going weeks between systems with no working communication.

ICSolutions is owned by Advanced Technology Group (ATG) which is owned by Keefe Group and ultimately TKG and HIG Holdings. That the same corporation owns both the Keefe commissary empire as well as Trinity Services Group - the food contractor for many state prison systems such as Michigan DOC - creates a monopolistic conflict of interest creating the profit incentive to lower genpop food quality to increase commissary sales.

HIG holdings also owns notorious Wellpath - privatized healthcare provider for people in prisons such as Pennsylvania DOC - that mired in lawsuits has filed for bankruptcy protections in late 2024.

The FOIA'd ICSolutions contract contains detailed information on their monitoring capabilities. *The ENFORCER™* and *The ANALYZER™*, *The COMMUNICATOR™* allows prison staff to "look up physical locations, cross-reference contacts, visual contact networks, track gang affiliations, and facilitates sharing data with other law enforcement / intel agencies"

***Despite the proliferation of prison communication monopolies, some are in hot financial water. SmartCommunication, after scandalous family drama and 86 million in debt, filed for bankruptcy in Dec 2024. Write us for the full story***



## The Succession Battle For A Prison Empire

Luxury cars, mansions, a superyacht called Convict, and wined-and-dined sheriffs — a legal war is exposing the big business of extracting profits from prisoners.

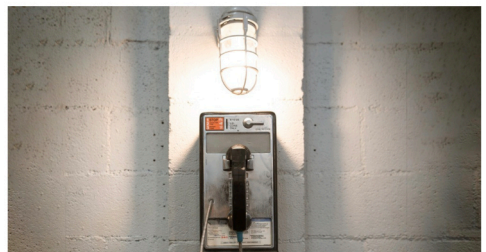


KATYA SCHWENK



## The Slow Death of a Prison Profiteer: How Activism Brought Securus to the Brink

On the hook to repay \$1.3 billion of debt this year, the nation's largest prison telecom company, Securus, is on the verge of bankruptcy. Its failure would represent a remarkable victory for advocates—and a potential beginning of the end for the industry as we know it.





# LOCKDOWNS AT FCI THOMSON

***We attempt the “administrative grievance” process but we get stonewalled and told that the mailroom “know what they’re doing and are following policy”***

Hello again from FCI (supposedly) Thomson: high security, low classification. “We run this like a medium because we can!” constantly on lockdown for no known reason facility! Guess what? We’re on lockdown again! We’re told this one will be 2 weeks plus, but not why. The TVs are all unplugged in the day room so we can’t watch the news, we can’t revalidate or change our tablets or MP3 players (which we have to do at minimum every 2 weeks or they lock us out), a radio sells for approx. \$60 on commissary (if we were allowed to shop). One other thing, our current meals consist of breakfast: 1 apple, 6oz dry cereal (bran flakes), and 1 pint of skim milk. Lunch & Dinner: 4 pieces of bread, 1 apple, 1 packet of peanut butter, 1 slice of lunch meat. So theoretically we are being punished for something to get this treatment, right? And, oh yeah, Warden Lammers has decided that mail is now a privilege!

Warden Lammmer’s [unpublished] Institutional Supplement on Mail and the way the head of the mailroom C/O Foster has chosen how to administer and interpret it. My cellie was nice enough to print out a copy so I could send it to you to help explain what is going on:

- The local procedures directly violate Program Statement 5265.14 and a couple laws

- No directives are actually referenced in this supplement
- A second paragraph this violates free speech and it was decided in the 70s that mail is a right not a privilege
- They are no longer notifying inmates of regulations so we don’t know unless someone tells us
- As per national policy only the Warden can reject mail and for very specific reasons SIS should not be involved in the process at all

Implementation: if it’s not a book, magazine, newspaper, or catalog, it gets copied. If it’s more than 5 pages, you still only get 5 pages. I had something come in from the FBOP regional office out of Kansas City and they copied that too! This prison decided that despite national policy there is no difference between personal mail and mail from a business. Newsletters are hit and miss, catalogs are thrown away 9 times out of 10 because they don’t have ‘FCI Thomson’ on the address or have a mailing label on them. We hear back from our families that they are getting mail back unopened and books sent back to Amazon without anyone being told why. Then of course there are the books that just vanish. People will go down to the mailroom with the tracking #s and mailroom staff will tell them; the tracking # doesn’t exist (it does). Just because it shows that the books got to the local post office it doesn’t mean they ever got here (our post office must be the worst in the US if they “lose” as much mail as this place says they do). Our mailroom is understaffed so it could be 2-4 weeks til they process our books, or our favorite “I don’t know, write an email”

**'There should not be a price tag on our life' | USP Thomson staff union renews calls for new mailroom screening protections**

According to the staff union, a nurse was handling inmate mail on Thursday when her face and hands started to go numb.

**17 officers taken to hospital after being exposed to ‘unknown substance’ at federal prison**





We are formally requesting that the North Central Regional Office take the following immediate actions:

1. Conduct a full investigation into the pattern of lockdowns at FCI Thomson, including the facility's justification for them and their impact on mental health, physical health, and all of the issues mentioned previously.
2. Investigate the ongoing issue of denied FSA credits and take corrective action to ensure inmates are receiving the programming and credits they are entitled to by law.
3. Require the facility to establish a clear and transparent policy on communication during lockdowns, including access to phone calls, email, and legal correspondence.
4. Address the ongoing issues of food quality, medical care, and laundry services during lockdowns.
5. Provide a formal written response with findings and proposed solutions within 21 calendar days from the date of this letter.
6. Contemplate a change of executive or other staff at the facility, given the current leadership's apparent inability to maintain normal operations.

(of course never gets answered). We attempt the "administrative grievance" process but we get stonewalled and told that the mailroom "know what they're doing and are following policy" even when we can prove they are not. And then, when we go for the third step which is sending the grievance out to the regional office, we rarely ever hear back. I personally have been told by 2 separate officers that a very large amount of mail is going to SIS and very little of that is ever returned to the mailroom. Another told me that ALL mail being sent to the regional or central offices now goes through SIS. All of this is according to the administration now national policy due to an officer in California coming in contact with Fentanyl and dying.

***"This appears to be another attempt to stop all incoming mail for good."***

I'm writing about FCI Thomson. The last several months the institution has been increasingly censoring our mail. It's a wide range of issues from discarding, not copying correctly, rejecting without notification and not allowing any pictures even from places like freeprints (family pictures).

On Tuesday April 15 4pm we were locked down for the rest of the night for a staff meeting. On Wednesday April 16 11:30am exactly when we finished eating in the chow hall the institution went on lockdown.

COs advised us the mailroom staff was exposed to drugs and also responding staff.

The Warden Lammer has since stopped

all incoming mail. Outgoing was stopped for a time. This appears to be another attempt to stop all incoming mail for good. They are already getting away with photocopying all of our mail!

Last year at this same time we were locked down for a claimed picture of a gun that was never found.

I'm writing about the censorship. Can you help bring attention to this? Please and thank you! - Anonymous

***"I can't even trust that you will get this! I just hope that someone out there can do something with this info to help us STOP these almost constant and obvious FALSE lockdowns!"***

I was once given one of your publications. I don't have a date, but it's the one talking about IDOC banning books and mail.

I'm here at FCI (ex USP) Thomson, where we lock down QUARTERLY for at least a week. I've been stuck here since Dec 26th, 2024. We have locked down:

1/4/24-1/18	"Cellphone in A-Unit"
4/25/24-5/28	"Guns" (which were in a different facility altogether)
9/2/24-9/18	"Staff Exposure"
1/18/25-2/7	"Race War" (2 Black - 2 Mexicans arguing over poker game)
2/21/25-2/28	"Staff Exposure"
3/9/25-3/18	"Threats to Staff"

Now, we've been on lockdown for YET ANOTHER staff exposure. The lie told to our local TV news was "12 officers" but the Gestapo interview said only 1.

However, this time they've gone a step beyond just the lockdown. Since the lockdown began on the 16th, ALL INCOMING MAIL HAS BEEN STOPPED UNTIL FURTHER NOTICE, according to the propaganda shoved through our door, this is due to the old umbrella script of "Safety and Security of the staff and population".

Now, not only can we not phone our family, we can write but not receive anything back. This also includes religious studies and LEGAL MAIL, as well as ordered books, magazines, and newspapers. We can only hope we will get them once their censorship stops. Last night, they even went around and unplugged all the TVs in the units. Please tell me where THAT falls under our "Safety and Security"!

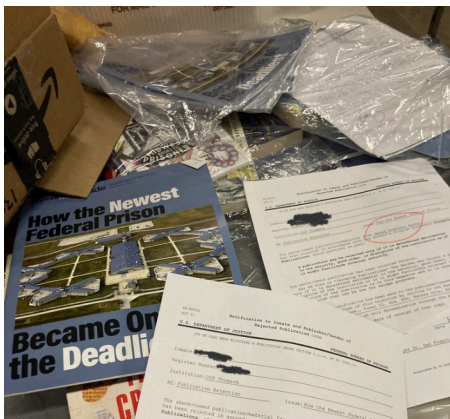
***"The Warden has stopped ANY mail coming in to the prison, regular mail, legal mail, religious mail"***

I got transferred to FCI Thomson IL December 6th 2024. Once here I got a job working in the kitchen on December 21st making 21 cents/hour. We got locked down 2 days in December. After the New Year it was ok the first 3 weeks or so. Then we were locked down in our 2 man cells maybe 7ft wide by 12ft long with a toilet and sink in the room. The January 18th lockdown went from 18th of January to Friday February 7th in the morning. The reason behind the lockdown was from the COs saying a Race War between 2 races, so the whole complex was locked down. During that lockdown the first 2 weeks in January we received

for breakfast 1 little bag of Bran Flakes, 1 fruit, & 2 half pint milks. For lunch and dinner we received for each meal 1 peanut butter packet, 2 jellies, 4 pieces of bread, 1 slice of meat, and 1 fruit. That's all we got for the first 2 weeks of lockdown. We also received 6 shower days Jan. 21st, 23rd, 27th, 29th, 31st, and February 3rd.

The second lockdown since I've been here was February 21st 2025. This lockdown went until February 27th. This was due to an exposure to a drug they said as a shakedown occurred in a different unit than the one I'm in. Meals improved to hot trays for lunch & dinner. We received 1 shower on February 25th for the whole week. The third lockdown happened on Sunday March 9th. This lockdown is about Threats to Staff and it was over on March 21st. We received hot meals again and only received 3 showers March 12th, 14th, & March 17th 2025.

The current lockdown started April 15th at 11:15AM on Tuesday. So far the meals have been hot and we had 4 showers. April 18th was a warm shower and the CO let us get hot water for coffee, get tablets charged for 15mins. But on Monday April 21st, the showers were freezing cold and it was impossible to shower, as well on April 23rd. On Friday the 25th the showers were so hot that the water almost burns your skin. Last night the COs unplugged our TVs. The reason for this lockdown is COs were exposed to something in the mail room. During this lockdown the warden has stopped ANY mail coming in to the prison, regular mail, legal, religious. I'm hoping this will get to the place it's going. Thanks for your time



*Copies of The Marshall Project's magazine being rejected by USP Thomson for their investigative reports on the prison. FCI Thomson was a newly built supermax owned by the state of Illinois before sold to the feds to form USP Thomson's "Special Management Unit", the notorious supermax 2 year solitary confinement step-down program. The SMU program was shut down in 2023 after investigations into rampant torture and murders orchestrated by guards, but has since changed into a Low*

***In April 2025, we heard from multiple people at FCI Thomson about the bogus lockdowns and the suspension of all mail. We circulated their prepared statement and initiated a phone zap targeting the Warden and the BOP Regional Office: within days they came off lockdown and mail was being delivered again.***



## HUMAN RIGHTS VIOLATIONS AT FCI THOMSON!

### Lockdown Status

Due to recent incidents with hard contraband, for the safety, security for both staff and inmates, FCI Thomson will be on modified operations, effective April 16, 2025. Inmates will remain secured in their cells except for showers, which ordinarily will be conducted three times a week. All meals will be satellite fed in the unit and pill line will occur in the unit. Rounds will be conducted by medical and psychology staff to address any concerns.

**At NO time will you be allowed out of your cell and/ or open your cell door unless escorted by staff.**

Visitation is canceled until further notice.

**We are circulating reports from incarcerated community members at FCI Thomson asking for outside support**




**After yet another manufactured #17 mailroom guards hospitalized" stunt, people living there have been continuously locked down and deprived access to mail/phone, visits, outside rec, law library, medical care, laundry, adequate food, etc**

**Tell the BOP to End the Lockdowns!**  
**TOM-ExecAssistant-S@bop.gov 815-259-1000**  
**NCR-ExecAssistant-S@bop.gov 913-621-3939**



AFGE 4070 "union" boss Jon Zumkehr (pictured here meeting with Eric Sorensen D-Rockford) has been spreading disinformation through these "blue flu" fake overdoses at least six times over the past few years to an effort to deprive the rights of people incarcerated at FCI Thomson and promote federal legislation which would ban physical mail in favor of third party digitization corporations. The proposed law H.R. 1046 "Marc Fischer Memorial Interdiction of Fentanyl in Postal Mail at Federal Prisons Act" was named after the mailroom guard who supposedly died from contraband-infused mail, but according to the autopsy and the government's own filings, Marc Fischer "died of natural causes from a heart attack". There is no evidence to support any of the alleged mailroom overdoses anywhere or that banning physical mail or increased lockdowns would stop the availability of drugs behind bars,

### Despite 5 years of mail scanning to keep drugs from Pa. prisons, problems remain

Updated: Apr. 21, 2023, 8:11 a.m. | Published: Apr. 21, 2023, 5:12 a.m.  
 PennLive Patriot-News



#### MISSOURI NEWS

### Overdoses Rise in Missouri Prisons Despite Strict New Mail Policy

MODOC moved to digital mail to curb the flow of drugs, but inmate overdoses are up

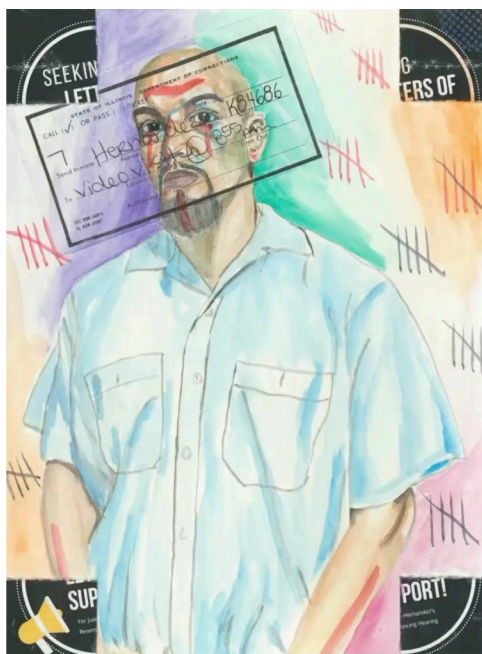
By Ryan Krull

Oct 17, 2022 at 11:02 am



***Studies show that state prisons that use mail digitization services have NOT reduced overdoses or availability of drugs***





## THE CONTINUED WEAPONIZATION OF ADMINISTRATIVE RULES

A dear friend of mine was permanently restricted from in person visits recently, why? Simply because during our video visit she discussed the possibility of recording our next video visit. I repeat, she was permanently restricted from all visits because she discussed the possibility of recording our next video visit. No rules were broken except by Dixon Correctional Officers who continuously weaponize administrative rules to make prisoners lives miserable and disconnect us from our families.

Nowhere in the Rule Book does it say that it is a rule infraction to discuss the possibility of recording a video visit. It is a rule violation to record a video visit, but that is not what occurred here. The officer monitoring our video visit preemptively and permanently restricted her for a rule violation that never occurred! A simple warning of the consequences could of been given while listening to us but instead decided to go to the extreme. When we received our notification slip of her being permanently restricted it stated this as the offense: "During your visit with individual in custody #K84686 Juan Hernandez you were discussing taping visit scheduled for November 13 at 9:30 a.m. to be featured at art gallery exhibit." What offense was violated here?

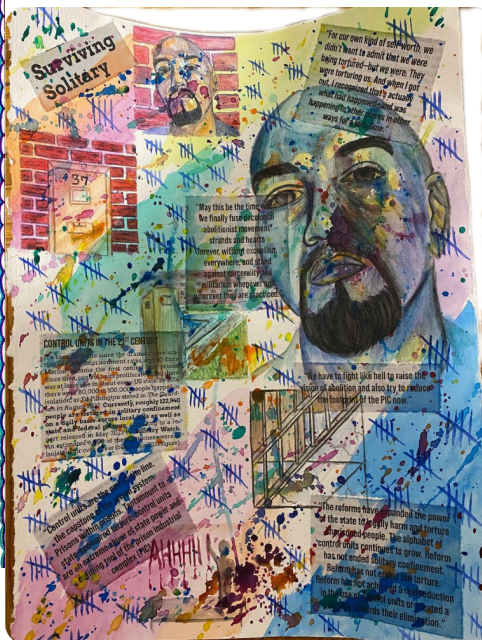
During the actual video visit my friend and I talked about the possibility of recording a short reel during our

next visit. The recording would be used for promoting and talking about my upcoming art exhibit titled Reverse Order in Ed Woodham's SHOWROOM. The recording would of been in no way threatening nor create a concern for anyone's safety or security. Coincidentally something came up that day where my friend wasn't going to be able to make it to our visit so the recording would of never happened.

This friend of mine has been a crucial benefactor on my road to rehabilitation, much more than I can say for the Department of Corrections. In the short time since our paths crossed I've been able to bring so much positivity into my life and the life of others through art. For example, I've helped raise funds for books through bars programs and strike worker funds, shown my art in international galleries, spoke on panels, been profiled by Latino Rebels, received grants from the National Association of Latino and Culture and the Ruffin Foundation, and have published writings in Teen Vogue, Prison Journalism Project, the Latinx Project NYU and others. I'm also the first (and so far only) incarcerated artist to work with CPS Lives! and the After School Matters Program.

What has Dixon Correctional Center done for me? It has harassed me for selling my artwork, completely stopped the selling of canvases on commissary so no one can paint anymore, it has sent me to the hole for giving someone needles who just got out the hole himself, it's overlooked me on every job opportunity and school assignment, and now they are excommunicating me from someone who is a positive influence in my life!

By, Juan C. Hernandez #K84686 12-12-23



Check out more from Juan Carlos Hernandez at his Instagram @jch\_convictedart or his website <https://www.jchconvictedart.com/>



**TELL DIRECTOR HUGHES &  
GOVERNOR PRITZKER:**

**DON'T STOP THE MAIL!**

The IDOC and a group of legislators are trying  
to quietly halt mail from reaching people  
imprisoned in IL- they must not succeed!

toolkit: [bit.ly/IDOCmail](http://bit.ly/IDOCmail)

**TAKE ACTION NOW!**

**CALL THE GOVERNOR-**

Tell them you **OPPOSE** any proposal to further limit  
or restrict delivery of mail to people incarcerated  
in IDOC- including transition to electronic delivery!

**USE ANY/ALL OF THESE NUMBERS:**

312-814-2121	217-782-6831
312-814-2122	217-782-0244
217-782-6830	Hearing Impaired: 888-340-1009

Call script in the toolkit- or just speak from  
your heart!

toolkit: [bit.ly/IDOCmail](http://bit.ly/IDOCmail)

***“Don’t take away our reading  
materials just because some  
officers are crying wolf.”***

Hello and good morning. I am writing  
to you concerning the individuals who  
are conspiring to deprive me and other  
prisoners of our Constitutional Right to  
receive mail and reading material in  
prison. Please don’t take away our mail  
and publications.

Please don’t let our freedom of speech  
and expression, our rights to receive  
mail, and our access to reading  
materials become privatized so that we  
can become extorted out of our money.  
I cannot afford to pay any more just to  
get access to my mail, neither can my  
family afford it. Don’t take away our  
reading materials just because some  
officers are crying wolf.

If the officers are being exposed to  
drugs like they claim, then why can’t  
they prove it? Where is the evidence to  
support the officers claims? Why is  
there no mailroom staff being exposed  
to drugs, except, for officers? I am  
fairly certain there is not a drug in the  
world that only affects people who are  
officers. If there is someone who gets  
caught with drugs in their mail, then  
punish them and place their mail under  
surveillance, but don’t punish the rest  
of us when we’ve been following the  
rules. Finding out how and who is  
bringing drugs in and holding those  
people accountable will be far more  
beneficial or productive than stopping  
our mail ever will. A little effort, proper  
precautions, and common sense can  
help to alleviate these issues. Taking  
away our physical mail will only take

away our reason to stay away from  
drugs.

We have been asking the officers why  
the mail lady hasn’t ben exposed to any  
drugs, but somehow officers have been,  
because the mail lady handles all the  
mail that comes through our prism and  
it doesn’t have drugs on it when she  
handles it, but somehow it allegedly  
does when the officers ahndle it. The  
officers claimed “that’s because drugs  
come through the legal mail, not the  
regular mail”. If this is known... why is  
everyone calling for all of our non-  
legal mail to be suspended? What  
purpose does that serve, other than an  
ulterior motive?

I would like to point out that the  
officers wear rubber gloves when  
passing out legal mail, so I don’t know  
how they get exposed to anything. Also,  
to my knowledge, all the drug exposure  
tests have come back negative, which  
contradicts the officer’s claims of a  
drug exposure epidemic.

It is important to note that the IDOC  
officers and their union have been  
caught in the past trying to scam  
taxpayers for their money when they  
conspired to file their carpal tunnel  
class action lawsuit, which proved  
false. It is upon information and belief  
that the officers are attempting  
something similar with these alleged  
drug exposures. Plus, they get the  
added benefit of taking more things  
away from us in the process, which is  
something they always seek to  
accomplish.

We have already had almost all of our  
out of cell time taken from us, under

In the last two months, we've only had two yards and i've only been able to get to the Law Library twice in that time.

If I can't do legal research or otherwise work on my case;

If I can't draw or paint because of lack of materials or opportunities;

If I can't read any books from the library;

If I.D.O.C. doesn't want me to receive any publications through the mail;

If I can't play cards or otherwise keep my mind occupied and entertained;

If I can't get out of my cell to exercise...

Then what else is there for any of us to turn to but drugs and violence?

The policies, the actions, and the inactions of I.D.O.C. are driving more and more people to drugs. Please, don't compound upon this by censoring our mail or preventing us from receiving mail or publications, because they mean more to us in prison than I can describe in words.

the guise of new policies meant to give us better access to showers and phones. It has had the opposite effect. We have less movement now than we did in a maximum security prison.

The Warden at Big Muddy, upon arriving here, immediately went after and shut down all the leisure time services and any programs we had to entertain ourselves and stay away from the drugs and violence - particularly Dungeons and Dragons and Magic The Gathering players. They don't want us playing it, so they are doing things to make it impossible to play, even though the people who play those things are about the only ones not associated with drugs in prison. Our Art Class has been shut down and they won't sell us the basics that we need to work on Art, like white paint or any paintbrush sets or drawing pencils. We haven't been able to read any books from the library since March because they fired our librarian and haven't replaced her. Our dayrooms are now segregated, so we have even less time to socialize or interact with others.

In the last two months, we've only had two yards and I've only been able to get to the Law Library twice in that time.

It is difficult enough for us to rehabilitate ourselves in prison, even more so when IDOC is hindering our attempts or otherwise preventing us from doing so.

Now there are people on the outside trying to make our lives even more difficult when they have no idea what

it's like to be in prison. Please don't punish the rest of us for the actions and words of a few. Find a better solution. Don't assume that the officers are telling the truth, because they have a history of lying, and worse, so make them prove their claims before making any decisions. Help me and others like me to become better people than we used to be; don't hinder us from bettering ourselves.

Thank you for your time and patience, and for the opportunity to speak on my own behalf concerning mail and publications. I greatly appreciate any help you can provide in protecting our right to receive and obtain mail and publications. I for one need the sentimental value that it provides in order to make it through life in this hellhole we call prison.

I am sending a copy of this letter to Governor Pritzker's Office, and to Latoya Hughes, director of IDOC. I can only hope that it helps. -

**"I plan on writing my rep over the books + mail ASAP when I get more envelopes. This costing 80 cents per envelope does hurt compared to the old 50 cents per stamped envelope. Our water currently smells like a river and the taste is odd in the mouth to drink, let alone smell and bathe in." - Vandalia**

## **Restricting the mail or replacing it with scanning WILL NOT increase our safety.**

I, the undersigned, on behalf of myself and all individuals currently incarcerated in the IDOC or will be in the future, am writing in protest of the proposed change in policy that will suspend delivery and/or electronically scan incoming mail for people in the Illinois Department of Corrections (IDOC). All parties considered are opposed to any action that will temporarily or permanently halt the processing and delivery of original, physical mail to those of us incarcerated.

The safety of those that live as well as those that work in IDOC is important. Restricting the mail or replacing it with scanning WILL NOT increase our safety. It has not changed the influx of drugs in other states that have replaced physical mail with scanning. There is no evidence that banning physical mail produces any safety benefits for the individuals that live or work in any institutions. Instead of suspending our treasured form of communication with our loved ones on the outside, we urge you to explore evidence-based solutions that foster safety, rehabilitation, and connection instead of restricting access to this indispensable lifeline.

Thank you for your consideration of this important issue.

## **Times are indeed changing - as well as the continued loss of IDOC prisoner rights!**

I'm 62 years old now, currently on 33rd year of imprisonment. So I've been around, have seen too much; yet reading your enclosed News Roundup we learned of IDOC's new efforts to ban

books generally and per policy rule 05.02.151 to ban hardback books.

For almost 24 years I've been stuck in hell that is called Pontiac CC. Oddly, I've always been able to have hardcover books sent in/received from family/friends, wonderful bookstores like yours, and ordering from various mail order companies such as Hamilton. I know the mail room gets away with not following rules when any mail is denied: I've had family & friends get their mail returned to them with no notice of reason why!

We saw reported on local news that IDOC will do a pilot program in about 7 months transition to private mail digitization service. I'm not sure if that will be through crap company GTL and ViaPath which already profiles just crappy tablets apps and services which in a word sucks: sadly it's the only game (scam) for music access IDOC inmates have. The one app that's not provided is a legal app to do our own legal research to fight for our freedom! To wit - IDOC doesn't want us to obtain our freedom in any respect.

Many suspect actors will make \$ from allowing mail to be put on tablets. Security will always find a way to do less work and inmates always end up paying the price and enduring to suffer loss of rights and so on. No question Illinois politicians, IDOC and justice departments are all watching closely how the federal prison USP Thomson, other state DOCs surely our neighboring state Wisconsin to see how mail scanning there is faring as IDOC gets ready to roll out the pilot program. As to civil actions brought against IDOC for bad conditions, harms, loss of rights, catch-all rulings allowed IDOC its evil deeds to continue and take take from inmates under the needs of safety and security of staff and prisons themselves, fuck the rights and conditions for inmates.

Pontiac, Illinois

It doesn't help that we don't have a librarian at the moment. I don't think we have had one for over 6 months now, and I don't think they have posted the job listing yet. It didn't help though, that when the last librarian was here, she decided to get rid of a lot of books that she claimed were old.



The mere faking of an overdose should be a profound revelation as to the sort of unethical tricksters taking up residence in the skins of trustworthy and honorable employees tasked with facilitating the objective rehabilitative standards required to transition Illinois Department of Corrections' residents back into a convoluted society that requires us to become functioning members within our communities.

***"We strongly detest being manipulated and lied to by the very institutions charged with our well-being"***

I heard about the officers union and guards peddling agendas to lighten their workload. It's another good way of going about it the wrong way, though. There needs to be an enforceable penalty for state actors willfully perpetuating insightful asseverations to the detriment and suffering of others. In that talking point that they were so intentional to propagate, was there any mention of tracing the tainted mail back to its source in order to affect an arrest? The mere faking of an overdose should be a profound revelation as to the sort of unethical tricksters taking up residence in the skins of trustworthy and honorable employees tasked with facilitating the objective rehabilitation standards required to transition IDOC residents back into a convoluted society that requires us to become functioning members within our communities.

Are there not now substance sniffing dogs in the mailrooms to detect the substance that allegedly caused the overdoses? Are there not drug sniffing K9s along the chow hall routes to sniff out residents transporting this k2 crap as officers so kindly hinted of doing but as of yet have not? One thing's certain, security knows who the smokers are.

A while back when Rob Jeffreys was the IDOC director, they started (prematurely) announcing newer and better tablets with all of these new updated apps. They even went as far as to discontinue the sale of the current GTL tablets and even suspended the purchase of link units for our existing

tablet subscriptions. Real talk: "we strongly detest being manipulated and lied to by the very institutions charged with our well-being."

***"I am pissed off. I count on these books."***

You recently sent me books: once again, this mailroom has stopped all but one you sent. They again said books had unusual stains. I paid to send them home: my people went front to back several times and saw not one stain or marking.

I am pissed off. I count on these books: many times we don't get library.

I informed you Dixon CC does not allow hardcover books. Their whole library is mainly hardcover and in 25 years I've never seen or heard of an inmate constructing body armor. Not ever.

I'm beginning to believe it's because you stand up for inmate civil rights to read and the book bans they're trying to enforce.

I thank you all for your hard work. I know many if all volunteer to do this. I do appreciate you standing up for books now.

Dixon, Illinois

***"Why not wear a mask and gloves while sorting mail?"***

I would like to thank you for the services you provide. The mail is indeed life-changing for people behind bars. I could list several reasons why, but just getting mail or books and seeing your name on the mail list gives people a feeling they still exist. For some of us, we've been socially isolated due to incarceration: simply put, our friends



and family have just moved on, we can't get people to answer the phone much less send us a book or write us a letter. For many of us, snail mail is all we'll ever get. If that's taken away, we'll lose nearly all the communication with the outside world. Combine that with taking away books that have real potential to better a prisoner's education, mental and spiritual health, and overall knowledge. The DOC is obviously hindering a prisoner's ability to rehabilitate. I haven't heard of any mail carriers having the issues the DOC is having. Also why not wear a mask and gloves while sorting mail? All of the non legal mail we get here is scanned and we get a copy of the original so I don't understand how this is such an issue. -

*Anonymous Bosch, Marion, Illinois*

### ***“Why is Chess considered a security issue to be banned from the tablet game’s selection?”***

What people here at Big Muddy River CC are writing grievances on is that the Cos are claiming medical emergencies because they walk onto a wing and

smell smoke. They claim to be nauseous and light headed, they feel like they are going to faint/pass out. But what about the people on the wing that have to smell the smoke on a constant basis, but aren't passing out?

It doesn't help that we don't have a librarian at the moment... It didn't help that when the last librarian was here she decided to get rid of a lot of books that she claimed were old and happened not to be checked out. A lot of those books she ended up throwing into the trash.”

Why is Chess considered a security issue to be banned from the tablet game's selection?

*Big Muddy River CC, Illinois*



MailGuard Processing Center | Seminole, FL



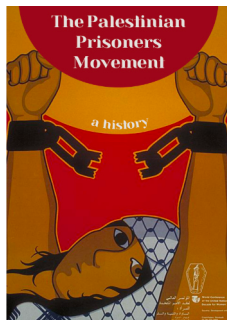
Toola Taylor  
 #CreatingMyOwnLane  
 #TheUrbanTakeover  
 #TOOLA  
 #BestSellingUrbanNovel  
 #AfricanAmericanFiction  
 #UrbanFiction  
 #TheSwipeNovel  
 #TOOLaTheWriter

### **@toolathewriter**

Several Illinois legislators are proposing Illinois House Bill 5389 which will amend the current Code of Corrections to make it LAW to deprive prisoners of their incoming mail and mandating that said mail be scanned and made available only through kiosk and tablet services. This will include the ban of all books. The inability of a prisoner to receive and cherish physical mail from loved ones, supporters, advocates, etc., etc., amongst other things, will ultimately mentally tear down, deject, and depress many prisoners who depend on them for HOPE. Being able to hold a physical piece of mail from someone who loves you, supports you, and/or fights for you is imperative - not only to maintaining one's mental health - but connects to his or her desire to change. And books have been - and continue to be - life-changing to numerous individuals in prison. The members of the legislature who are currently lobbying to make this change have been misled to believe that the proposal of this law is about the safety & security of prison staff and stopping the proliferation of drugs into the system, and continue to make this push despite not having been provided any clear or reliable data of such a draconian deprivation being an actual solution. This is currently being implemented in prisons across the country - all failing to demonstrate that depriving prisoners of their mail works, or protects staff from medical incidents - and there have been no confirmed incidents connecting alleged prison staff fentanyl overdoses to incoming mail or books. In fact, there have been numerous such allegations by prison workers that have been debunked by medical professionals - yet, organizations such as AFSCME are organizing protests outside prisons, staging walkoffs and coordinating disinfo campaigns to support/drive this legislation. But - the TRUTH is - this, ultimately, is a MONEY GRAB.  
 #Illinois #Censorship

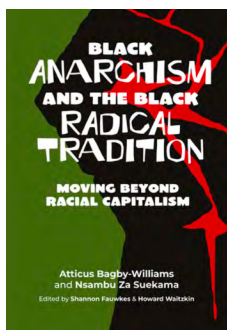
# The Censorship of Ideas is a Form of Psychological Warfare: A Message from the Diversionary Treatment Unit

By Hybachi LeMar



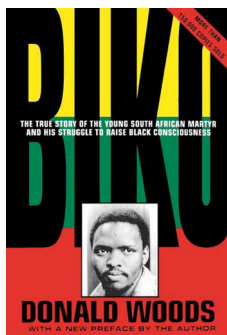
In *The Palestinian Prisoner's Movement: A History*, it's written that "the primacy of the liberation of prisoners as a collective goal of the Palestinian resistance is also emergent from the unity of imprisonment as a place of militant development, training, and socialization".

It teaches of the universality of imprisonment as a weapon of warfare, and occupation, and that whenever there is occupation, there is rebellion, and that even the most brutal forms of imprisonment can themselves become schools of revolt.



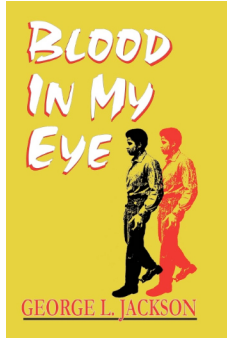
In *"Black Anarchism and the Black Radical Tradition"*, Atticus Bagby-Williams and Nsambu Za Suekama articulates that "black anarchist politics reside within a cultural oral tradition". Letters from jail and from exiled revolutionaries and self-published literature in the form of zines, primarily because many initial black anarchist intellectuals emerge from prison struggles.

Brother Lorenzo Kom'boa Ervin points out that these materials are weapons against fascism, illiteracy, self-hatred, and lack of self-esteem. Printing and sharing these ideas revolutionary enough to subvert these interlocking oppressions are an essential means of our psychological self-defense.



Defense against kick-backs, coverups; of mice that eat through ramen noodle packets, of chipped-walls, peeling ceilings, roaches, no cell windows or air conditioning; slave labor, periodic denials of suicides. We're in a violation of freedom of press: it takes maneuvering under radar, under the censors, ideological - [this is a call from Pennsylvania State Correctional Institution Huntingdon. This call is subject to recording and monitoring]

Not a single lifer I spoke with where I'm confined was aware of the 2016 nor 2011 country-wide prison strike: a political form of protest - largely due to targeted newspapers denied to them by mailroom officials.



What helped me get through while in the hole? Self-discipline, meditation, and the application of knowledge. A healthy vibe of: do pushups and study. Do sit ups and study. Do dips off the side of the toilet and recall what I've learned while pacing the cell.

Robin D.G. Kelly acknowledged the way Robert F. Williams insisted that "all young black activists undergo personal and moral transformation". It was a familiar lesson embodied in the lives of Malcolm X & later George Jackson, the idea that one possesses the revolutionary will to transform one's self.

Government attacks on newspapers and books have played a particularly violent role in South Africa during apartheid. For example, as early as the 1950s, it was behind the repression of union papers like Morning Star; and in the 80s, on books like "Biko", on the South African Bantu revolutionary who was banned from being communicated with while in public as well as his teachings before his torture and execution.

The power of print can also be felt in Rojava. Before 2011, when North and East Syria was pregnant with revolution, we saw several similar circumstances: labor pains, miscarriages of justice, society saturated with corruption and nepotism; surveillance and censorship everywhere. These very conditions, however, spawn a species of thinkers who evolved, who brood over books, whose diet consists of ideas, who find themselves stirring, mutating, in the reservoir of the repressed social imagination.

Before his assassination August 21, 1971, general and field marshal in the Black Panther Party George Jackson spoke of his revolutionary awakening, of his transformation. While in San Quentin he wrote "I met Marx, Lenin, Trotsky, Engels and Mao; and they redeemed me."

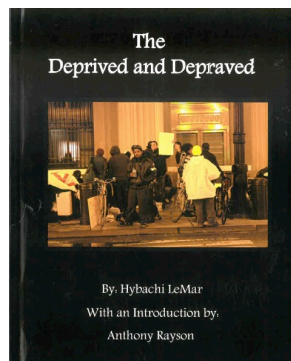
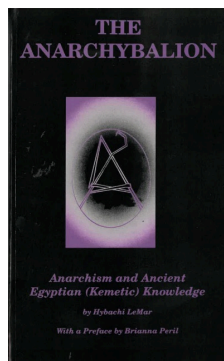
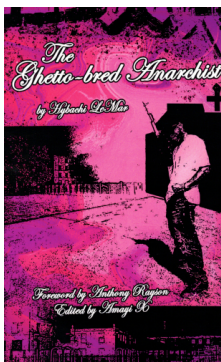
And from an isolated cell on İmralı Island, Abdullah Ocalan - the now-renowned revolutionary of the Kurdish freedom movement - became exposed to the social ecology writings of anarchist Murray Bookchin. He cross-bred Bookchin's ideas with his own principles of self-determination, which assisted dynamically in hatching the Rojava revolution.

Ocalan analyzed how our ecological crisis is a symptom of human hierarchy and domination. And with this diagnosis, directly inspired the democratic autonomous administration of North and East Syria DAANES with a radically feminist revolutionary prescription of direct democracy against the state.

The force of censorship has failed to repress the resurrecting powers of Black consciousness our martyr Steve Bantu Biko gave rise to; nor did it stop General George's message in blood from making it clear to the American government that if it continues to kill us, then there will be funerals on both sides.

In the final analysis, the censorship of ideas is a form of psychological warfare. The state might ban our books, they may dispose of our bodies, but they fail to annihilate our ideas.

Our beloved compa Casey says "forward ever; forever forward." It's practically scientific: the more the repressive hands of state forces struggle to hold us back, only catapults us further into the expanding arms of the revolution.



Check out Hybachi LeMar's books and other writings! (GBA is on the ban list in NJ and OR state prisons, probably others) Write us for a copy or order on [HelpACompa.com](http://HelpACompa.com)

## ***“They bully us women”***

I have been incarcerated 18 years! We are not allowed anything that shows body parts! We are mothers and grandmothers! We're not allowed journals of any sort! No art books that teach you things, how to draw or create. No children's coloring books! If we get them, we have to either destroy or donate! We can only order books from J.D. Marcus or Union Supply catalogs just so we have to pay high prices for the books, because the system gets a huge cut for our staff who say that they're underpaid to sit on a computer all day or sit there and do nothing and yell and scream at us from the officer's desk! They bully us women, take advantage of our surroundings, they now don't even have to have a High School Education or GED to be employed. All the old officers leave because of the way they treat us women.

We have mold and rust everywhere, but don't have the money to replace these items - beds, showers, cabinets where we put our clothing and underwear. Rust is an item that can cause lockjaw - mold can kill us! They'd rather use

taxpayer dollars to buy lights on their heads for the medication line, or lighted wheels on their health care emergency medical bags! And 1/2 the time the boys are full with items that are non-functioning. They say they're understaffed so they can cage us up like animals and when they let us out at the least 10 people go to see because they're wound up! They lock us down when Madison comes in to see how we are treated, and no one can talk to any of them. They cover up a lot! Especially the men COs that yell and scream at us because they're overworked - yeah ok 1/2 of the COs fall asleep on their jobs! But they don't reprimand them for that! We are a med-max facility that most of us all get treated like we're supermax or death row! Our grievance system is for the COs. Wish we could have Law Library on our tablets with flash drives, not allowed yet, that's what's important! I can't get no legal help unless I have an Open Case.

Thanks for allowing me to respond. I will write anytime. I am a Voice from within these Walls!

*Logan Correctional Center, Illinois*

**Forbes**

MONEY > PERSONAL FINANCE

## **Bureau Of Prisons To Restrict Mass Emails To Prisoners**

By [Walter Payto](#), Contributor. © I am a consultant on white-collar crime and...

[Follow Author](#)

Published Oct 08, 2024, 04:23pm EDT

*The Bureau of Prisons is implementing a new system to restrict mass emails coming into prisons.*



“The BOP issued a statement from BOP Public Affairs’ Ben O’Cone stating, “In response to an Office of Inspector General (OIG) audit of the Federal Bureau of Prisons’ (FBOP) Monitoring of Inmate Communications to Prevent Radicalization (March 2020), the OIG recommended that the FBOP establish controls that mitigate the risk of individuals communicating with unknown and un-vetted parties and take steps, including the utilization of available technological features as found in TRULINCS, to reduce the risk of mass emails being received by high-risk individuals, including terrorists. As a result, the FBOP’s Executive Team decided to reduce the number of emails that an outside party could send into a group of incarcerated individuals to ten. This measure was taken to comply with the OIG audit.” It would seem like a more sensible approach would be to restrict the emails and improve monitoring of certain prisoners so the larger group of prisoners could continue to enjoy those newsletters.



# Communication Crackdown in Federal Prisons Has Been Operating Quietly Until Now

By Silja J.A. Talvi, Truthout  
Published June 7, 2024



“The Federal Bureau of Prisons (BOP) has quietly but steadily been implementing a nationwide policy that silences the voices of people incarcerated in federal prisons by

preventing them from sharing the same email and phone contacts for people on the outside,” also known as a “double contact ban.”

The policy, which gives prison authorities wide leeway to censor communications, appears to have gone through an intensive test run for the past two years at a Minnesota women’s federal prison, FCI Waseca, where roughly 900 incarcerated people received a written warning from the warden on March 13, 2024.

The notice sent to prisoners’ emails could neither be printed nor forwarded. Truthout was able to obtain a copy of the policy, which reads in part:

*FCI Waseca Inmate Bulletin: “Recently, a review by SIS [the Special Investigative Services] was conducted on inmates’ email and phone accounts at FCI Waseca and it was discovered inmates are actively sharing emails, addresses and phone numbers with other inmates housed at FCI, and within the Bureau of Prisons. With the exception of approved inmate to inmate correspondence, legal correspondence, advocacy groups and educational information, the sharing of email addresses and phone numbers pose a safety and security concern for the Bureau of Prisons and FCI Waseca.”*

## California prison system considering mail digitization

Dozens of organizations published a letter demanding the protection of physical mail for people incarcerated in California:

Dear California Budget and Corrections Leaders,

We are writing to raise serious concerns regarding the possible implementation of digital mail scanning across California state prisons through the California Department of Corrections and Rehabilitation’s newly executed contract with Securus Technologies.



TO:

Midwest Books to Prisoners  
1321 N/ Milwaukee Ave PMB 460  
Chicago, IL 60622

*"This "return to sender" form I got, I think it's from the "newsletter" you send with the twitter feeds and articles. Our mailroom has basically lost their minds and are arbitrarily making their own rules."*

, no photos printed on home printer, more than five pages, printed front and back  
Printed or Typed Name and Written Signature of Correctional Systems Officer)

J. Haynes, CSW

Record Copy (with material); Copy - Inmate; Copy - Mail Room File.

- ☐ NO INSTITUTIONAL NUMBER CANNOT IDENTIFY
- ☐ NO ONE WITH THIS NAME/NUMBER
- ☐ ITEMS NOT PERMITTED IN INSTITUTION
- ☐ CORRESPONDENCE NOT APPROVED
- ☐ NAME AND NUMBER DON'T MATCH
- ☐ CAN'T IDENTIFY SENDER
- ☒ STICKER/TAPE AND WHITEOUT NOT PERMITTED
- ☐ FOREIGN STREET ADDRESS



*Hundreds of petty rejections from Menard, Sheridan, Robinson, and Pinckneyville as cover for political censorship*

Figure 3. IDOC Lockdown Days

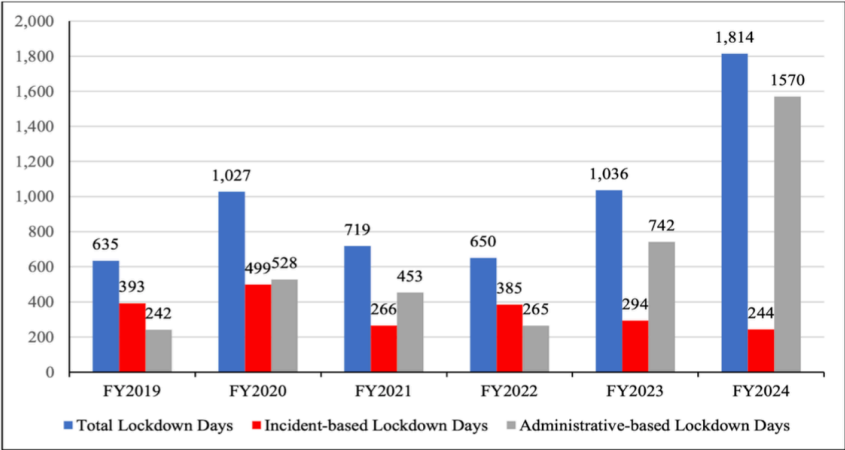
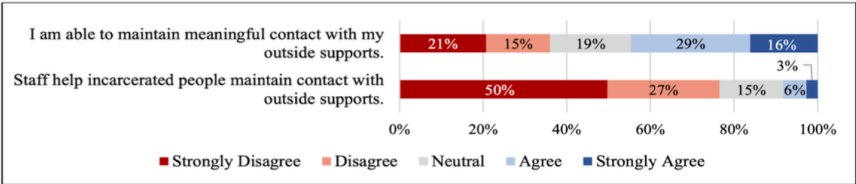


Figure 4. Access to Outside Supports Reported by Incarcerated People (n=8,572)



Source: John Howard Association

Re: Book Donations

STATE OF INDIANA  
Department of Correction  
Indiana Government Center—South

302 W. Washington Street • Indianapolis, Indiana 46204-2738

To whom it may concern: Phone: (317) 232-5711 • Fax: (317) 232-6798 • Website: [www.in.gov/idoc/](http://www.in.gov/idoc/)



Christina Reagle  
Commissioner

The decision was made to no longer accept donated books for offenders due to the books not meeting our policy standards. We continue to receive books in poor condition with stains, highlighted content, stickers, markings, etc. The offenders are not allowed these books and it slows down our overall process. All books received will be refused and returned to your company.

Re: Book Ban at Pendleton Correctional Facility

To Whom It May Concern,

Thank you for your email dated May 1, 2024. The Indiana Department of Correction ("IDOC") reviewed your email and investigated the letter you received from Pendleton Correctional Facility regarding no longer accepted book donations. We confirmed with the staff in the Pendleton Correctional Facility mailroom that this letter was sent to your organization. This letter was not reviewed by IDOC legal staff, nor was it approved by the facility Warden. The letter you received is not in the spirit of our Correspondence Policy 02-01-103, nor does it comply with our State's requirements regarding printed matter.

IDOC Legal has instructed Pendleton Correctional Facility to immediately rescind this decision and continue to process all donated books per policy. As a reminder, the IDOC does have some limitations regarding printed matter that may be received by our incarcerated population.

Pendleton Indiana's mail room guard Yolanda Chambers rejects anything she doesn't like as "stains" or "STG", and once tried to ban all "donated books" but Indiana DOC reversed this after a well-crafted letter asserting our rights and the rights of the confined. One comrade has been retaliated against for filing grievances on the rejections by being falsely accused of receiving drug-soaked mail (eventually dropped): now there's an active federal lawsuit for denying access to mail communications.

UNITED STATES DISTRICT COURT  
SOUTHERN DISTRICT OF INDIANA  
INDIANAPOLIS DIVISION

LARRY WARREN,  
Plaintiff,  
v.  
LONT YOLANDA CHAMBERS, DENNIS  
REAGLE, MAGGIE BRYANT, CHARLES  
HOUGHINS, JEFFREY MALOTT, CHARLES  
COCHRAN, QUENTIN RUIZ, T. CRUZ,  
AARON SMITH, MEGAN LITTLE, CHRISTINA  
CONYERS, RACHELLE BRUMSFIELD,  
BRANDIE GARLAND, CHLOE WARGNY,  
MICHELLE RAINI, TAYLOR MCCOCKLE,  
SARAH JONES,  
Defendants.

Case No. 1:23-cv-1964-JRS-TAB  
(To be supplied by Clerk)

FILED  
11/01/2023  
U.S. DISTRICT COURT  
SOUTHERN DISTRICT OF INDIANA  
Roger A.G. Sharps, Clerk

PRISONER COMPLAINT 4A U.S.C. 1983  
VERIFIED COMPLAINT  
I. INTRODUCTION  
Plaintiff Larry Warren, DCR-SC, brings this Complaint for

In the past year, two of our correspondents were falsely accused of receiving mail from us that allegedly tested positive for drugs. Both people were put in restrictive housing and had communication privileges taken away. We followed up with them and called the prison to complain, and they eventually had their disciplinary charges eventually dropped. Prison officials may act differently if they know that people outside will bring attention to their false charges.

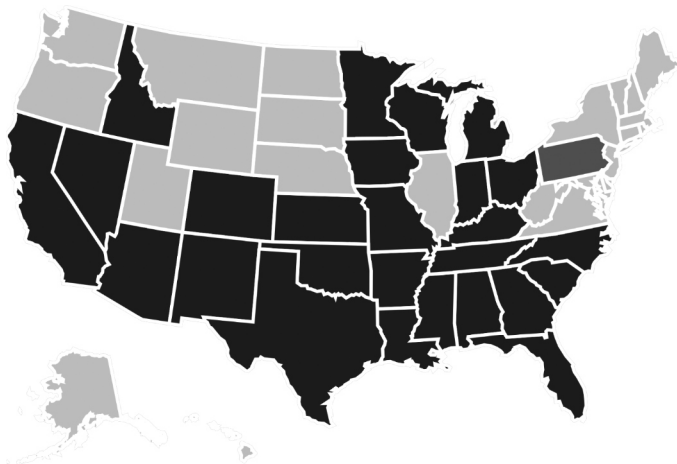
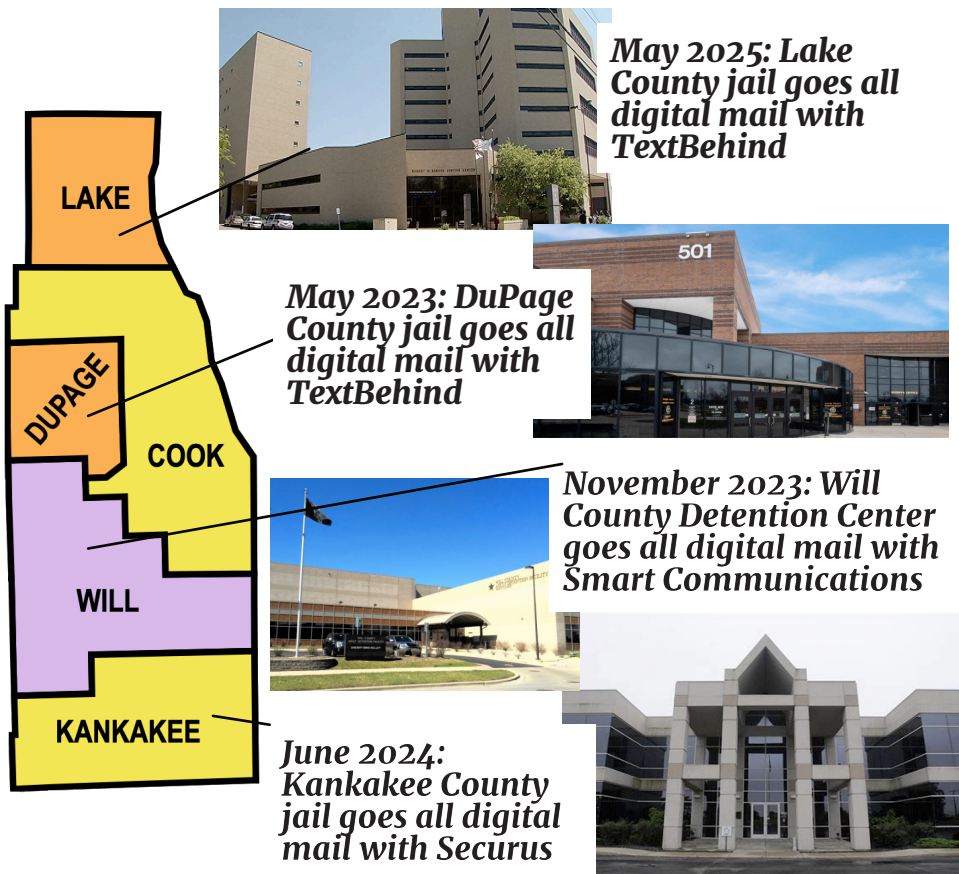
First & foremost I want to Thank You for calling wake & calling their BS. I was let out of restrictive housing 4-11 & transferred to Hyde CI the write up was dismissed, NC Prison System is corrupt & there is alot of wrong doing going on by those in charge. I'm down to 60 days now & have signed up for the CDL program. It really means alot that yall stood by me, it may be why the charges was dropped. Your doing good by helping prisoners with books. Thank You for everything.

How it started...

... How its going



***Most jails in Chicago's surrounding counties have eliminated all physical mail in favor of profiteering digitization contractors***



**State prison systems have transitioned to mail scanning at an alarming rate – from 3 states to 27 in just four years.**



**After switching to TextBehind to eliminate physical mail, Wisconsin DOC went after the books: last August, Wisconsin Books to Prisoners was told they could no longer send to people throughout WIDOC prisons. After campaigning and negotiations, they appeared willing to allow books from just their group so long as it's "new books only".**

## Wisconsin prisons restrict books and mail to keep drugs out, but some staff still bring drugs in

Critics say the Department of Corrections is limiting prisoner access to information while wider entry points for drugs remain open.



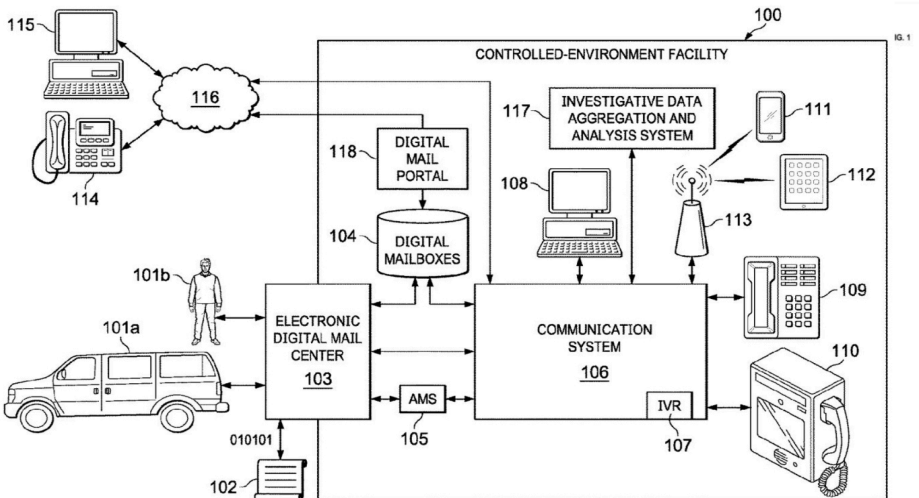
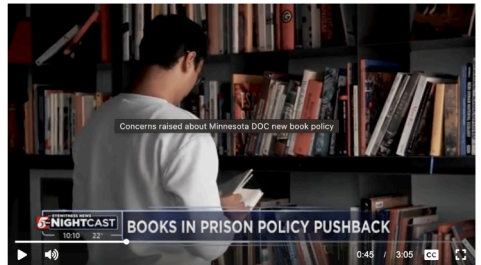
by Mario Koran / Wisconsin Watch and Hallie Claflin / Wisconsin Watch  
October 2nd, 2024



**Minnesota DOC also fell to TextBehind mail scanning in November 2024, and initially restricted books to only a few vendors. Fortunately, multiple Books to Prisoner groups including ours was able to pressure them into loosening these policies to allow for our groups to continue to share books.**

## Minnesota DOC restricting how incarcerated adults in the state can purchase books

Callan Gray KSTP  
December 19, 2024 - 10:55 PM



**SmartCommunication's patents on MailGuard™: they hilariously failed trying to sue other prison tech corporations for copyright infringement**

# Minnesota

**November 2024: Contracts with TextBehind to digitally scan all incoming mail: people receive printouts. All books initially restricted to 5 vendors; after campaigning, expanded to include 5 Books to Prisoner groups including ours**

# Iowa

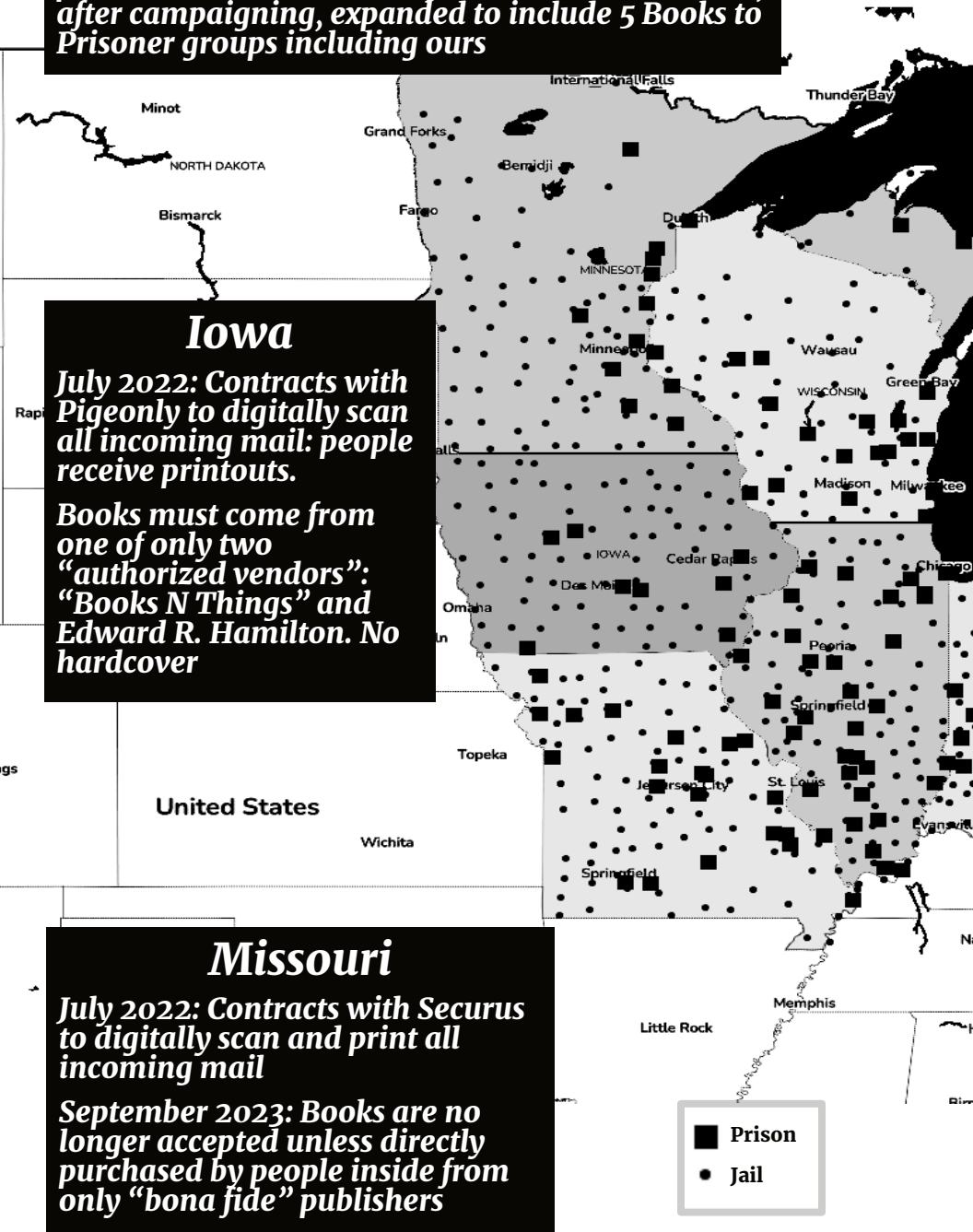
**July 2022: Contracts with Pigeonly to digitally scan all incoming mail: people receive printouts.**

**Books must come from one of only two “authorized vendors”: “Books N Things” and Edward R. Hamilton. No hardcover**

# Missouri

**July 2022: Contracts with Securus to digitally scan and print all incoming mail**

**September 2023: Books are no longer accepted unless directly purchased by people inside from only “bona fide” publishers**



# Michigan

**\* All incoming non-legal mail is photocopied: the originals are not given to the recipient**

**\* January 2025: Contracts with TextBehind for DOCS "legal mail" system requiring attorneys to register to supply QR codes on each mailpiece to verify the source**

**\* Books must come from one of six "authorized vendors": Amazon.com, Barnes and Noble, Edward R Hamilton, Schulerbooks, Walmart, or Prison Legal News (after a 2019 lawsuit)**

# Ohio

**2025: ODRC contracts with Global Tel Link to digitally scan all incoming mail. 1/2 the prisons are already implemented, 1/2 are receive photocopies**

**"Legal Mail" requires attorney registration with ODRC. In May 2025 the Ohio Justice & Policy Center sued over the policy of scanning attorney-client protected mail.**

**Books must come from "authorized publisher": interpretation and rejections vary from prison to prison but have steadily increased. No used books**

# Indiana

**2025: New Command 5 tablets from GTL/ViaPath**

**2020: All incoming non-legal mail is photocopied: the originals are not given to the recipient.**

**2018: Indiana DOC began restricting only to Amazon and Edward R Hamilton. In 2021, a HRDC lawsuit forced them to reverse this: books are now accepted. No hardcovers, petty rejections increasing**

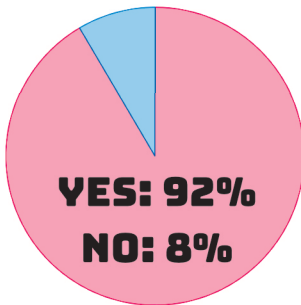


# Prison Censorship Survey

As part of our campaign against prison censorship and book banning, we've sent over 1200 zines and surveys out to our incarcerated correspondents in the trenches so we can understand the current situation and develop strategies. We've published the full responses on our website, but we're sharing a few excerpts here. Combined with the responses that others in the coalition have received, it's a wide-ranging, enlightening, and heart-breaking perspective of the problem. It has lit a fire in our souls, reminding us of the urgency and importance of this campaign.



**Have you ever had books or other materials blocked or confiscated? If so, which ones? Why? Tell us about it.**



"4. Zines from East Bay Prisoner Support, Life without Law, The Insurgent Southwest, The Solitary Anarchist, Grand Jury Investigations FBI Harassment and Your Rights. I have filed an appeal to BOP Regional Office. I will exhaust my available remedies & file a lawsuit." – *Marion, Illinois*

"Economic Books, Legal Mail, Education Material. Confiscated for suspicion of drug trafficking." – *Cook County Jail*

"Yes. I've had prison legal news and prisoner revolutionary news letter blocked. I was told that it contained language that incites violence or poses a security threat to the institution." – *Westville Correctional Facility*

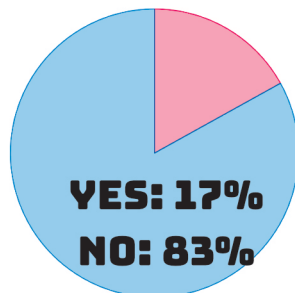
"House building (how to build, from site selection through paint and rugs) Apparently "safety & security" However, I

know the book-building houses as my trade – so shouldn't I, too, be kicked out of prison for "safety & security"? The history of the Black Panther Party – and I'm white; so I'm not allowed to read history books that contain true historical anecdotes?" – *Menard*

"The book I requested and ordered was denied because it was about Tai Chi of which they claim it was for martial arts purposes. I wanted them for meditative purpose to help with my depression and anxiety." – *MCC Chicago*

"Yes. OUT Magazine. It's a mainstream LGBTQ magazine that is commonly called "obscene pornography" and "injurious material". I subscribe to this as many other inmates do. The institution library routinely targets each issue now." – *WIDOC*

**Have you ever been punished for reading material that was sent to you? If yes, what were the materials and what was the punishment?**



"Yes. Not for reading books, but for refusing to dispose them. Staff took them, and trashed my cell, while searching. Also, failed to place items as they found them." *USP-Marion*

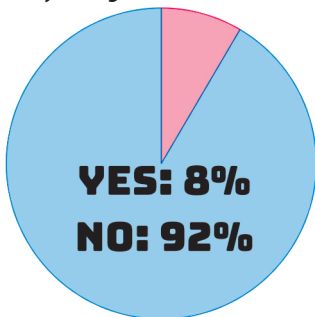
"When I was at USP-Thomson, Midwest Books to Prisoners sent a magazine, which was not allowed due to the magazine having a picture of USP-Thomson on the front and/or USP-Thomson was mentioned within the magazine. The act of confiscating the magazine without letting me read it was a part of the punishment, then I became distraught, depressed and I started having anxiety attacks, which I am diagnosed with." - *USP-Beaumont*

"I have been punished and retaliated against such as unfactual disciplinary conduct reports to harassment from Internal Investigations. Cannot attend special court letters. Forced to pay higher shipping costs to send the material back to the publisher." - *Pendleton, Indiana*

"5000 Awesome Facts (About Everything)" I was called in front of the entire unit (180 men) to explain why I was ordering books meant for children. I was threatened with the hole and being shipped to another facility where the inmates would mess me up." - *USP Marion*

"Yes. They give us STG gang tickets (even though I'm not in one) for books on runes, ethics, or anything they deem we shouldn't have. We can get from 6mo - 1yr in seq and even a transfer to a higher security prison. 90% of the time the "offensive" material is harmless." - *Pinckneyville*

**Should the prisons have the power to control what you can and cannot read or see? If yes OR no, why?**



"No. Because it is our constitutional 1st Amendment right." - *Cook County Jail*

"No. Institutions should not limit what we read or see because they do not know why we want to see or read the materials we are sending in, they cannot read our minds nor do they truly understand what we are trying to do in our individual paths." - *Cook County Jail*

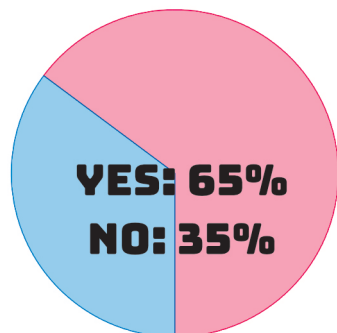
"No. It's for my rehabilitation. We need to know what's going on in the world to survive once release from jail/prison." - *Cook County Jail*

"No. Everyone has the right to read/see/ believe whatever they want. Reading expands the mind and allows us the opportunity to see/view/debate other people's beliefs. Unless someone acts out because of their beliefs they should be punished but not everyone. People should be held accountable for their actions, not placing it on others, or something they read." - *Pinckneyville*

"No. Prisons shouldn't have the right to control what incarcerated people read. I am a first time offender, during my incarceration I have been housed in two "Correctional Centers". In both I observed one fundamental political mind, that of the Alt-Right. Many of the CO's of all ranks regurgitate the talking points of the Far-Right Conservatives. Some are so bold to spew White-Supremacist ideologies. Seeing how most of the prison population, from prisons I've been to, are overwhelming non-white it isn't hard to understand why prisons shouldn't have the power to control reading material. To me it is obvious that they will restrict any book that undermines any ideology or political system they practice or believe in." - *Menard, IL*

"No. I was confined in the 1990s and actual pornography like "hustler" and "black tail" was allowed without problems and in 1997 it was taken away and thereafter the Dept has just not had any ability to actually enact a uniform policy by which I mean enforce the written one they have, they just do what they want and cite the policy" - *WIDOC*

**Are you in a facility that scans incoming mail? Does the mailroom copy or scan newsletters and other printed reading materials? Does the facility's scanning policy affect your ability to read books and literature?**



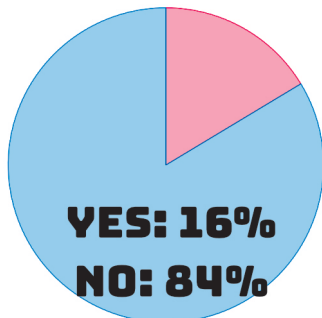
"I'm at a facility that scans everything. The pamphlet I received from yall and the survey was scanned. Yes it makes it hard to read..the words are smeared. They have a really bad scanner." - *New Castle, Indiana*

"Yes. I am being denied to have access to Hard-Cover Books stating a safety & security issues but I can have a television or GTL-tablet that has glass, and plastic that can be turn into a weapon and more of a security threat than a Hard-Cover book. The I.D.O.C is putting profits from the GTL-Tablet from music, podcast, game, and movie apps over inmates safety & security." - *Westville CF, Indiana*

"Yes! To all above! Also affects legal access. Many court mail is treated as not legal & copied open outside my presence. Photocopy envelopes are often missing postmarks & such. Privileging themselves to my legal & personal issues." - *USP Coleman I, FL*

"WIDOC uses TextBehind, who regularly butchers the quality. Text isn't too bad, but photos get massively degraded regularly. The same photo can be sent multiple times and out out looking different each time. They've even squished photos out of proportion just to fit them onto one page rather than printing it correctly on another page (obviously to save a few cents). As an artist, having my reference imagery come through distorted is aggravating, and it's disrespectful to treat my family photos so poorly." - *Waupun, Wisconsin*

***In your present facility or any previous ones, did you receive a clear explanation of the facilities censorship policy? If yes, is it applied consistently or fairly? If no, what is it they tell you when something gets blocked?***



"No. LOL :) I laughed when reading this one. They not telling you NOTHING. They don't believe in "clear explanation". All they know is get rid of it..." - *CCDOC*

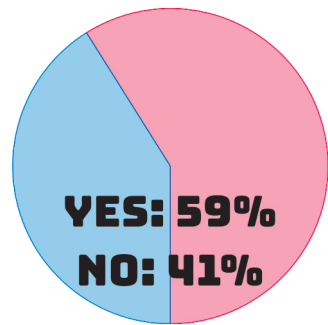
"When something is denied we get no say-so and the paper we get is too vague with simple descriptions such as - obscenity on

pg 24, or security threat on page 24..." - *Pinckneyville IL*

"All they usually say is it is confiscated due to facility policy. If you are lucky they might give you a bullshit excuse why they confiscated it. It all comes down to them trying to control us." - *Miami CF Indiana*

"At my previous and present facility, the book censorship policy is vague. It basically is up to whoever is in the mail room." - *Menard, IL*

***Have you ever filed a grievance against your materials being blocked by the mailroom or getting confiscated? Were you successful? What was the explanation for blocking the material?***



"I was in Stateville CC then, and as is well-known, grievances get "lost" or they take months to a year to respond, yet kept the 30-day process of disposing the book running. So the book was sent home a year before the grievance rubber-stamped the same standard excuse: safety & security." - *Menard, IL*

"No. This facility targets complainants so its prudent to "pick ones battles". My singular complaint involved stapling of photos was met with denial, then a policy change, then photos that were "lost" & never found." - *FCI Elkton, Ohio*

"The grievance was unsuccessful, the #1 reason, which we cannot get around is they say "for the safety and security of the institution" they will not allow it in." - *Pinckneyville, IL*

I have filed a grievance against material being blocked by the mail room. I won some of them, and when I do, I rarely got the book. The explanation for blocking the material I tried to get in varies, and is vague, but mostly it is because the mail room officer didn't like it." - *Menard, IL*



## Why do you think prisons censor what materials you can get? What's their game?

"I think prisons censor the materials we can get as a form of control and punishment to keep us uninformed and ignorant. The less we know, the more they can manipulate us and abuse us." - CCDOC/IL

"They give all kinds of reasons, but I truly think it is to make us feel as miserable as possible. They don't have to do it, they choose to. So that means they do it out of spite." - Miami CF Indiana

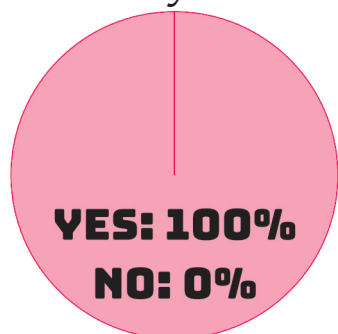
"I believe that prisons censor the materials we can receive to control us from becoming enlightened; from being woke. I believe they censor us for the same reasons mentioned in "The Lifespan of Anti-Literacy" by Wayland "X" Coleman featured in your pamphlet - I strongly agree with Colean's article." - Menard, IL

"Prison censors material because it is the most anti-educational facility ever built. There is no other place that works so hard against you trying to better yourself. Several inmates here have given up on trying to take correspondence courses as the mailroom constantly delays and loses mail. The prison wants you to fail and return to keep the prison full." - FCI Elkton, Ohio

"We have two censor powers here in the program I am in. The mail room, then the treatment staff. So I am hit double hard. The end game is to scan the mail. I am civilly committed and they should not be going through my mail. But the law is not followed." - Big Muddy River CC, IL

"Fear. They want to keep us from being educated, it is easier to control the people if they remain uneducated and we all read, write, listen to the same music, watch the same "programs", wear the same clothes, etc. 'The most dangerous prisoners are readers & writers.'" - Centralia, Illinois

**Is reading important to you? If yes, how so? As a way to pass time? As self-improvement? Education? Do you read daily?**



"Reading is my method of expanding my knowledge and wisdom in order to grow mentally, emotionally, physically, and spiritually. I also use reading for recreation as a way to relax and escape into another world. I read everyday at various points throughout the day." - CCDOC/IL

"It is my current only way to escape from this situation" - Jacksonville, IL

"All of the above, I read for a way to pass time, self-improvement, education. I try to read a copy of hours a day. And do you know if they accomplish this censorship/banning of reading, it will push us back to the stone ages." USP Beaumont

"Everything you mention. Plus entertainment. Education covers everything (mental, spiritual, emotional) but also cultural, ethnical, gender, etc. Education = Knowledge= Understanding. Understanding kills prejudice. Mark Twain has a quote about travel and understanding being fatal to hate & prejudice." - Menard, IL

"All of the above. When I am reading a book I am not in prison, I am in the story. Plus the only way I am going to better myself so I dont come back to this place is education, because this place doesn't offer no other way to better myself. Yes every day." - Miami CF, Indiana

"It helps pass time. Helps me become smarter. Also helps calm me down at times. It also helps me escape reality. I also do read daily." - North Dakota State Penitentiary

"Reading is very important even though I am slow at it, but the more I read the more educated I get. I've started reading in the penitentiary. I use it not to pass time, but to get eternal knowledge. I have a gift. What I read, I gain sight from my subconscious to allow me to be conscious. Although I do not read daily, only certain basic like biblical knowledge. I have a drive for prophecies." - Dixon-Illinois

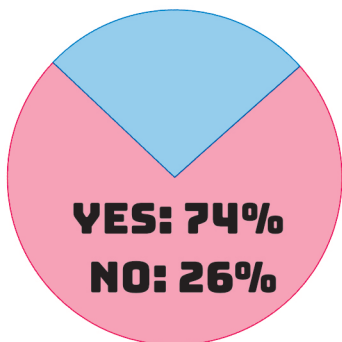
"Education: I read daily and I feed my brain so I can elevate myself, like Malcolm X and Huey P Newton and Angela Davis" - FCI Petersburg

"Mainly for knowledge and self improvement. When I can't get my books in from being censored and blocked, I have to go to my prison tablet and research case law so I can gain knowledge in fighting my case criminally and fight civilly against the prison system for violating my constitutional rights." - Pendleton, Indiana

"I read daily, it helps me learn about myself, this struggle we fight as transgender women, people & working people." - WIDOC

"Due to reading I applied myself in so many ways and I'm currently enrolled in an advanced paralegal program of which I've scored 90% on my first test and I'm now enrolling with Adams State University to get my Bachelor's Degree in sociology." - MCC Chicago

**Are there things you want to read right now that are blocked? If so, what are they and why do you want them?**



"Computer book. They don't want us learning computers. Yet the world is basically run by computers." - North Branch CI, Maryland

"Yes. House-building books to keep abreast of new technology, tools, etc. Yet, on TV I can learn and take notes. Would my notes constitute "banned material"? Probably. Can you say blanket (lazy) oppression? And; black, indigenous, P.O.C. history books so I can learn about my fellow mans experience I didn't have to suffer through to foment love and compassion." - Menard, IL

"There are a few books that come to mind. There was one about Jeff Fort, the founder of the Black P Stone organization. I wanted it because he fascinates me. Another was a book about the Black Panther Party. I want it because of align ideology with the Black Panthers." - Menard, IL

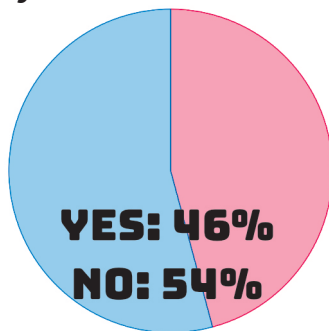
"I think the big one is Sun Tzu's "Art of War". It's one of the most significant historical texts out there, and I have a cultural connection to it as I'm Chinese. I'm of the opinion the ban on this book is racially motivated, or rather was when it first was banned, and the DOC is too stubborn to change. It's not like "The Art of War" holds any secrets these days, with some of his teachings being absorbed into modern psychology. And I can still access Machiavelli's writings, as well as a number of modern military strategy/tactic books and rather aggressive pseudo-psychology self-help books by Western authors. I'm vaguely curious in reading/suing the manga volumes I was denied that are [part of the same series that other volumes were approved. I can't believe a manga that hides nudity in one volume would show it in another, especially since both series have "Teen" ratings] WIDOC Waupun

"Everything! I'm supposed to and "not" supposed too. To rehabilitate and know my legal rights. And every opportunity the free world has. I been incarcerated 21 yrs. It's a

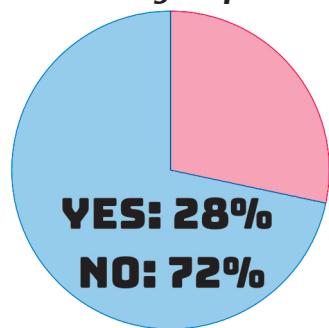
brand new world to me out there. I need to be ready." - Cook County Jail

"How to books on construction stuff so I can start and run a construction business when I get out of prison." - Westville CF

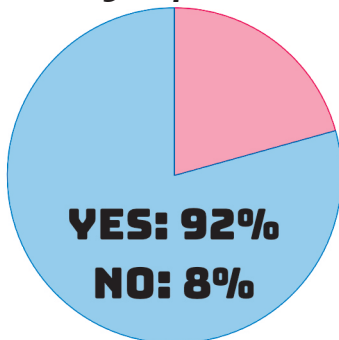
**Are you able to organize an authorized book club or reading group in your present facility?**



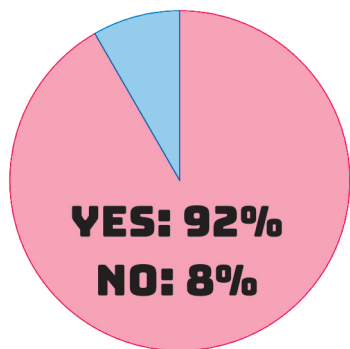
**Have you ever participated in a book club or group?**



**Have you ever been prohibited from informally discussing books as a group?**



**Do you have access to a law library? If so, are passes or ducats to the library readily available or tough to get? Do you receive the materials you need? Are there any restrictions you face, or barriers to accessing materials?**



"The law librarian comes to us upon requests given to the counselor, we no longer have access to the physical Law Library since COVID and even then, only certain divisions have a law library within. I do not receive materials need. I cannot get copies made of my certificates to give to my PD because law librarian wont copy them since they are not "legal documents" - Cook County Jail

"It's not hard to get to the law library, if the prison isn't on lockdown but we seem to be on lockdown a lot because of so called "staff shortage." When I do go to the law library, I'm able to get the materials that I need." - Westville CF, Indiana

"Tough to get a pass to the law library, no proper help when you get there" - Hill CC, Illinois

"The law library here is terrible! You can only be there 30 minutes. And go once a week by a pass. And a lot of time they are out of toner so you can't make copies." - New Castle, Indiana

"No, I am in Restrictive Housing Unit and the facility is constantly short staffed and incarcerated individuals are not getting adequate access to Law Library. Corrupt staff/officers destroying outgoing legal mail & domestic mail." - Westville CF, Indiana

"You can easily go to the law library but you are not allowed to walk around and do your own research. You have to know what you are requesting ahead of time, then they bring it to your if they have it. Usually they don't." - Pinckneyville, Illinois

"Yes. It's on several computers in the library and on one in the housing unit. We have

access, but it's not updated as often as I'd life and it does not include state laws." - FCI Pekin, Illinois

"Hard to get passes, they pick and choose when you go, you might have to put in several requests." - Pinckneyville, Illinois

"Our law library is on our tablets at NDSP." - North Dakota State Penitentiary

**How do you feel about the quality of the books made available in your facility's law library? Do you have access to printing or a copy machine? Is there a computer? What do you wish you had access to or available in a law library?**

"We do not have access to the books, only sections that we request. We have no access to printing/copy machines. Librarian does that for us. We have no access to a computer. I wish we had access to a physical law library where we could physically access materials and use resources we need." - Cook County Jail, Illinois

"No books to check out. It's all on computer - in unit, 1 computer with legal access for almost 200 inmates - and material is spotty/limited. Our printer/copiers are quite often "out of service". I would like full access to any & all legal materials." - Marion, Illinois

"The quality of the books available at my facility is lacking, they are mostly over used hand-me-downs. We do not have access to a copy machine. We don't have access to a computer. I would like there to be computers for us to type on, to draft clemencies or legal documents." - Menard, Illinois

"The copies that we receive are a late call, our law library are only open on Fridays. We have a two computer machine which I don't know how to work them. I wish that we could have available service to help us prepare our documents to the courts and reasonable access to pro bono lawyers within the state that we are from!" - Dixon, Illinois

"No new books since 2012 or earlier. All briefs of all parties in appeals or complaints are 'out of plan' or 'blocked by administrator'" - Jacksonville CF, Wisconsin

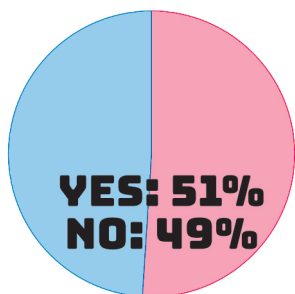
"I should not have to have a deadline to be able to access the law library." - Miami CF, Indiana

"Quality of books are pretty decent shape; I have access to a printer/copy machine, but it's been hard to get to this law library, due to these prisons keeping us on lock down status." - USP-Beaumont

"Only a handful of functioning computers. We need to be allowed to purchase word processors." - Indiana State Penitentiary



**Has access to the law library at your present facility changed following the pandemic? If yes, how?**

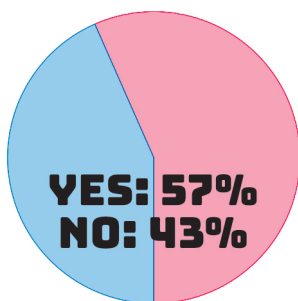


"Yes. The number of allowed to others at a time has been lowered, and only allowed to attend 1 day a week." - Plainfield CF, Indiana

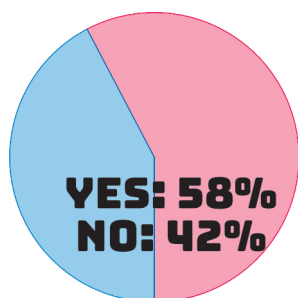
"Gotten worse. We had no access during the pandemic. Now it is hard because staff shortage or not doing their jobs." - Marlon, Illinois

"During the pandemic, we had no access and bare seen the paralegals. They did no rounds. Now we get to and hope to know what we need." - Pinckneyville, Illinois

**Does the facility allow you to bring books and other literature to the yard?**



**Are you allowed to share books or literature?**



"No. To share books is considered trafficking" - Plainfield CF, Indiana

"Books to yard, no. Yes, we can share books." - Big Muddy River CC IL

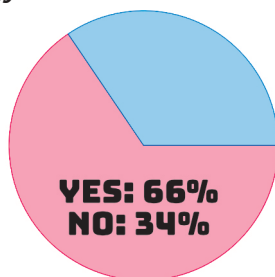
"We cannot bring them to the yard. At Menard. I was threatened with a STG ticket for bringing RPG books to the yard." - Pinckneyville, Illinois

"Not allowed to share anything, big rule. No loaning and borrowing allowed." North Dakota State Penitentiary

"They don't allow it, but you know how we get down." - Wabash Valley CF, IN

"Can bring to yard however we cannot share books because "unauthorized transfer of property" and they throw them out if found in others possessions." - Taycheedah, Wisconsin

**Do you use a tablet? If so, how do you feel about the options for reading material available on it? What companies provide services on it? What services do they offer?**



The reading materials are very restricted. The company is Edovo. The services offered are educational, movies, games, digital radio for recreational. There is also a phone system that sucks." - Cook County Jail, Illinois

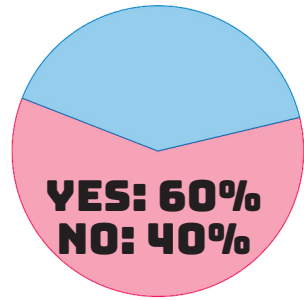
Music, movie, podcast, and gaming apps that GTL is "Price Gouging" inmates and their families to purchase the apps." - Westville CF, Indiana

"The options for reading material on our tablets is outdated. The tablet only has books that are public domain, most of the books refer to Black Americans as negro or colored. They company that provides service on our tablets is GTL and we get the bare minimum. All we have is a lot of censored music, movies, and books. They also censor our messages." - Menard, Illinois

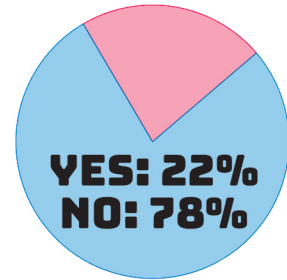
"They have no reading material on them. Only games, music, and movies to rent. Tables \$123.00. Games \$2-3 each. Songs about \$2 each. Movies about \$4.00 and can watch once." - FCI Pekin, Illinois

"WIDOC uses Access Tablets (I have a SCORE 7). The only reading material available is Project Gutenberg Free Library. There are obvious issues with copyright free material mostly from the late 1800s and early 1900s. About a year ago they updated it and dozens of books are now "prohibited", and if you had them they were removed from your app. It doesn't state why they're now prohibited. Some were anthropology books that had nude images in them, but nudity in anthropology materials is protected. Other bans are even more baffling. Since I can still see a list of the banned books I had downloaded, I'll list them. [...] There's a podcast app with about a dozen podcasts all from NPR, ESPN, or BBC, \$2 per month subscriptions, \$8/month music app. About 3 dozen games, mostly incredible shallow mobile games priced at \$3. Two of the recent new games, "Arch Knight" and "Budding Hero", were released with major bugs rendering them unplayable past a certain point. The "Andor's Trail" had 2 quests removed for "penological interests", which makes no real sense. In one you drug a jail guard and in the other you clear a prison taken over by demonic monsters and zombies. The game takes place in a medieval fantasy land. Keep in mind this is the same game where you play a child who joins a thieves guild, you steal and rob a number of people, you either extort or kidnap a woman for ransom, you could choose to murder several people, and various other 'evil' acts. But somehow roofyng a guard to help a petty thief escape is too much. There's a movie app, all tame PG-13 content, and they recently increased the price of "blockbusters" to \$4. The pricing seems arbitrary. There are 10 year old flops priced at \$4, but recent winners and nominees at \$3. Also the rentals only last 48 hours and have a play time limit so you can't watch it more than once all the way through. There's a Corlinks messaging app and an FM radio app, clock and calculator. There's no legal resources unlike many states, and there's no way to save text. The messaging app doesn't have a draft function and they've eliminated all exploits inmates use to save large amounts of text. The tablet vendor contract is up soon and everyone (Including DOC staff) is fairly sure Access will lose the contract in 2024. It's likely why they've switched music from a purchase model to subscription (lawsuits in other states keep upholding tablet vendors must reimburse inmates for songs/games they've bought while the vendor loses the contract), have stopped adding 2-3 games every quarter, and jacked up the movie rental prices. They know they're going to lose the contract too and are trying to squeeze all the non-refundable money out of us as possible." - *Waupun, Wisconsin*

***Has your outgoing mail ever been censored?***



***If you are a writer or artist, have restrictions on outgoing mail ever made it difficult to publish or self-publish your writing or creative works?***



"Yes, it took me 14 years to self publish my book." - *Western Illinois*

"Yes, I am always concerned about my mail not arriving to its destination or being tampered with." - *Cook County Jail, Illinois*

"I'm writing my 7<sup>th</sup> chapter of my book, but they won't let me make copies so I can send out" - *Cook County Jail, Illinois*

***Lastly, is there anything you think we on the outside or the general public need to know about censorship, reading, books, education, or your life inside? Feel free to write as much as you want. We will read and value every word.***

"I think there is a lot that I could say about this place that would shock and repulse people if they even believed it. There is so much evil in here and the corruption is great, but there are good people that work here and there are good men and women trapped in here. We are human beings, not demons. The world casts us out and ignores

us while we are not in chains, but we have brains, families, love, and God to hold us through." - *Cook County Jail, Illinois*

"There is so much I want people in the general public to know and understand about their fellow incarcerated brothers and sisters. Most of it I can't convey in a way most would understand. However, I want those on the outside to know this: prisons are not designed, as they are now, to rehabilitate most incarcerated people in any meaningful way. In my experience, during my ten years of incarceration, I have realized one thing. These prisons are overseen, supervised, and operated by white-supremacists... I am not being hyperbolic. To expect them to enforce any policy is absurd. Progressive legislatures can pass laws to do so, but it will rarely be enforced by the prison. On the other hand, any policy that adversely impact incarcerated people will be eagerly enforced. In such an environment is rehabilitation truly possible? Prisons are designed, for the most part, to break us down mentally, physically, and emotionally. It seems as though they deliberately do everything in their power to make us miserable. You might be thinking that, as a convict or a criminal, I deserve to be treated, inhumanly. However, we are all criminals... the only difference between you and I is that I got caught and you have not. Depending on your race, you have been caught, but have received a slap on the wrist. Is that justice? Is that the Law and Order? We can do better regarding prisons, as a society we have to. Many European countries are more compassionate

regarding their incarcerated people, and they return truly rehabilitated - for the most part. To truly fix this unjust prison system, we must redo one amendment, we most remove one of it's clauses. We have to rework the 13th Amendment because, despite what most people believe, it does not abolish slavery. If we were to remove the clause in the 13th Amendment that allows slavery for the conviction of a crime, the prison system would be a place, to truly rehabilitate. Let us finally abolish slavery in all it's forms, let's amend the 13th Amendment."

"Citizens out there need to know that just because I've made a mistake in my life, my rights still (should) exist. I'm still an American, a country that has a constitution and preaches freedom. But yet we are leading the entire world in incarceration! If you're reading this, you're getting involved. Keep getting involved!!" *New Castle, Indiana*

"Censorship just keeps getting worse. Im treated like an animal here without any rights. Since I have no contacts on the outside its very hard for me to get books or literature. I can use all donations. Please help. Met me know if you even receive this back. Thank You. Blessed Be" - *North Branch CI, Maryland*

"We don't have what society is led to believe we do - Reading material, health care, legal access, and just respect as humans. Jails & prisons get away with lots of misdeed, both illegal & unconstitutional. See law suits - state & federal facilities." - *Marion, Illinois*

## PRISON BANNED BOOKS WEEK

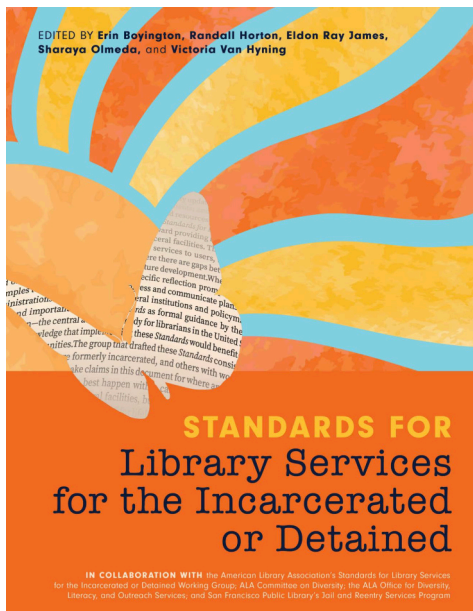
Single state prison systems censor more books than all state schools and libraries combined. Literature gets banned by prison mailroom staff quickly flipping through books as they inspect the mail. These cursory judgments sweep up medical books, drawing and art books, popular magazines, history books and literature of all kinds. Prison censorship prevents people in jails and prisons from reading.

The third, annual Prison Banned Books Week will focus on the exponential rise of "approved vendor" policies. Denying independent booksellers and limiting places to purchase books, sometimes to a single, bookseller, "approved vendor" policies are being passed around the country under the specious claim that mail is the primary conduit of contraband.



**PrisonBannedBooksWeek.org**





## **The American Library Association has come out with updated 2024 standards:**

Library services and resources should be regularly accessible and relevant to all individuals who are incarcerated or detained regardless of custody level, type of carceral facility, or informational need. Professional library staff should make all reasonable efforts to provide consistent access to both the physical library space and library services through institutional mail, book carts, or other effective access points where library services can be readily reached by the most facility residents. Access to library services and materials should extend beyond the physical space of the main library, including all restricted access units such as administrative segregation, hospital units, and crisis beds.

## **Best Practices for E-reader Tablets in Carceral Institutions**

Produced by the Coalition for Carceral Access to Literature and Learning (C.A.L.L.) with 58 partner groups. Write us for the full version, here are some excerpts:

“E-readers must supplement, not replace, access to physical books in carceral institutions or facilities... Books ordered through or donated by

prison book organizations and outside book vendors must also remain accessible or available... Access to digital books must not be revoked as a disciplinary measure: Access to literature is a right, not a privilege... E-reader vendors must reject pay-per-use models... E-readers cannot be held up as expanding access to literature for incarcerated people if the cost of purchasing a tablet is prohibitive for a large portion of the incarcerated population. E-reader vendors and carceral institutions must provide free access to digital books that are already a part of the public domain. E-reader vendors must make content that meets the literary and educational needs of incarcerated populations, including by developing e-catalog collections in consultation with librarians, educators, and formerly incarcerated people. E-reader vendors must make content in multiple languages available and be responsive to the cultural needs of incarcerated populations.

## **UN Standard Minimum Rules for Treatment of Prisoners (Mandela Rules):**

“Every prison shall have a library for the use of all categories of prisoners, adequately stocked with both recreational and instructional books, and prisoners shall be encouraged to make full use of it.”

1. In no circumstances may restrictions or disciplinary sanctions amount to torture or other cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment. The following practices, in particular, shall be prohibited:

- (a) Indefinite solitary confinement;
- (b) Prolonged solitary confinement;
- (c) Placement of a prisoner in a dark or constantly lit cell;
- (d) Corporal punishment or the reduction of a prisoner's diet or drinking water;
- (e) Collective punishment.

Prolonged solitary confinement shall refer to solitary confinement for a time period in excess of 15 consecutive days.

*Write us for free copies of these standards!*

*Write us for free copies of these zines  
about fighting prison censorship!*



**END BOOK BANS &  
MAIL CENSORSHIP at  
COOK COUNTY JAIL**



Midwest Books to Prisoners



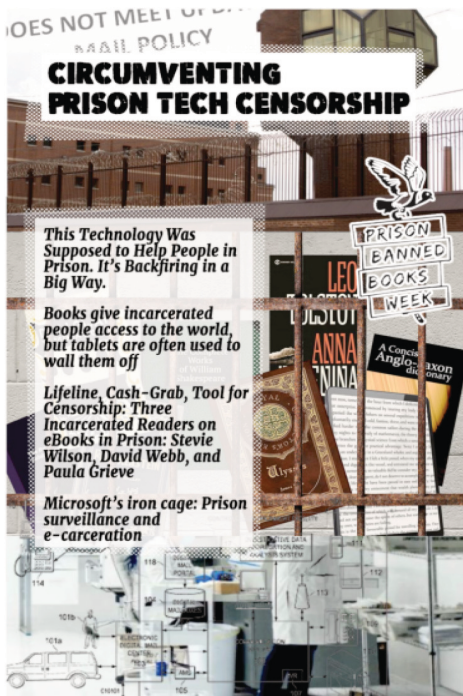
Campaign Against  
Prison Censorship  
and Book Banning



# The **PERILS** of **PRISON MAIL DIGITIZATION**

**THE FINAL STRAW  
RADIO SHOW**

**12.12.21**



Legal Resources to Fight Censorship also available upon request:

- “Lenient in Theory, Dumb in Fact: Prison, Speech, and Scrutiny” by David M. Shapiro
- “Turner’s Insurmountable Burden: A Three- circuit Survey of Prisoner Free Speech Claims” b by Kristen Schnell
- JLM Chapter 19: Your Right to Communicate with the Outside World
- Prison Policy: “Mail scanning: A harsh and exploitative new trend in prisons” (11/2022)
- Vera Institute for Justice: “More and More Prisons Are Banning Mail” (5/2022)
- Filter Mag: The Prison Mail Bans Aren’t About Fantenyl. They’re About Understaffing. (/9/2024)

City \_\_\_\_\_ State \_\_\_\_\_ Zip \_\_\_\_\_

Re: RTS zine

MAILROOM

APR 08 2022

RETURNED

phone card

photos/drawings

envelopes

Special mail services not permitted for indigent envelopes

Indigent envelope exceeds allowable 13 ounces

Face sheet/legal documents not pertaining to offender

Unauthorized use of facility forms

Item enclosed in plastic/laminate/lape/cardboard folder

Photos of staff / facilities

Artwork or items prohibiting adequate inspection, stickers, white-out, padded envelope/bubble wrap, unable to search

Multiple/duplicate photos/printed material, intent to distribute

Photos/publications featuring tattoos

Turned over to OSI for disposition

Field for review by

Photo of offender taken during incarceration

city of the facility, specific individuals or the general public, 3-way phone calls, people searches, etc.

not of the facility.

distortion or other criminal activity.

affiliation with security threat groups.

we illicit use of weapons, explosives or devices which create a substantial danger of physical harm or

e of drugs, drug paraphernalia or contraband.

ry, including such examples as:

nation, manufacture or distribution of weapons.

tured in such a way as to create a serious danger of violence to the community.

could create a clear and present danger of violence to the community.

a source other than family or persons on the

nts are written in code or not understood by

stin phrases, UCC citations, miscellaneous

(UCC-1) form and has been turned over to OSI.

or sanitation hazard, including perfume, lipstick, stams, etc)

y from the publisher/authorized vendor, or not paid in advance via offender accounts.

rectly from the publisher/authorized vendor, no receipt identifying the purchaser or

seen offenders.

d procedures, or was an unallowable item.

Department \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

Mail/Property \_\_\_\_\_

Lobotomized through the Throat

ination, safety or security threat and was destroyed by staff.

UTION (Check box below) or the item(s) will be disposed of / destroyed after 30 days.

copy, along with a pre-addressed letter-size 9 X 12 envelope hope to make a copy of it

otated to the Department th

king days of receipt of this

Review Authority or Propo

□ Ret

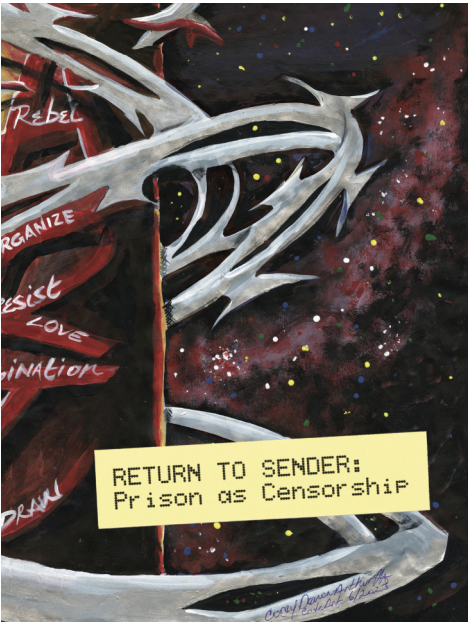
NOTICE: Mailed from a CORRECTIONAL FACILITY

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

OID #: \_\_\_\_\_

Address: \_\_\_\_\_

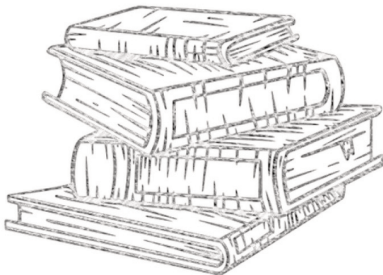
City/State/Zip: \_\_\_\_\_



Don’t Step Back,  
Fight Back!

Proposals for a Coalition Against  
Prison Censorship and Book Banning

By Lorenzo Kom’boa Ervin

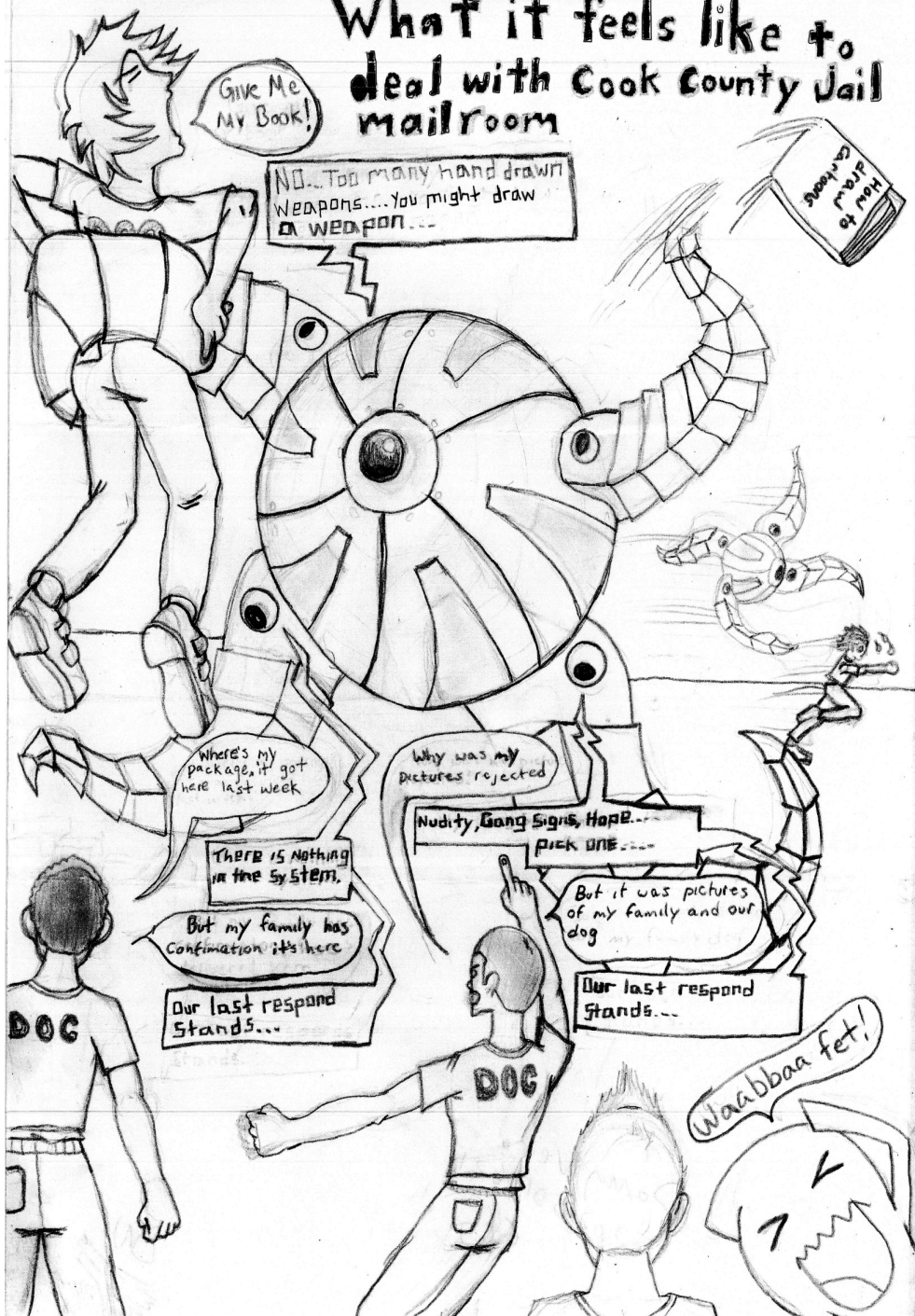


The Insider’s  
Guide to  
Jailhouse Law

A Publication of Prison Book Program  
2024



# What it feels like to deal with Cook County Jail mailroom



Danny Niera



**Notice of Unauthorized Item(s) Not Permitted**

Illinois River Correctional Center

DATE: 8/23/23HOUSING UNIT: 1D72INDIVIDUAL IN CUSTODY'S NAME: Juan Garnica NUMBER: M45737MAIL FROM: Books to Prisoners

- ☐ Cash and personal checks are not accepted at this facility. Money orders and cashier checks over \$200 are not accepted at this facility. You must use JPay to send money orders. Visit JPay.com to send money orders. Call 800-574-5729 to speak with a live agent 24/7.

Serial # \_\_\_\_\_

- ☐ Stickers, cologne, perfume, stick, napkins, plastic card or holograms.

- ☒ No cardboard, unused or unused greeting cards, envelopes, or postage stamps; art supplies, pens, pencils, sketch pads, photo albums, leather, felt, felt fabric, ribbon, yarn, string, hair, feathers, flowers, seeds, beads, napkins, or for poster, etc. No plastic cards, holograms, musical cards, homemade cards (glued, pasted or painted). No pens, pencils, highlighter, marker, glitter, stickers, emojis or crayon. No eyeglasses, jewelry, cologne, perfume or lipstick. Any foreign substance which cannot be determined daily or unusual stains.

\*\*\*Any items which can be purchased in the commissary are not permitted. See individual in custody handbook\*\*\*

- ☐ No roasting (refer to individual in custody handbook) metal spirals; compact disks - music or computer; recording devices; condoms; medications.
- ☐ No solicitation of money; unapproved business venture, lottery tickets or forms, etc; phone cards or gift cards.
- ☐ No mail or photos to or from another individual in custody or from a third party or mail from another individual in custody in a jail or correctional center, or in any manner that has not been approved. See your counselor for approval procedures.
- ☐ No photos of weapons, alcohol, money, drugs, inappropriate photo/s, no smoking in photos, STG/gang-related photos, hand gestures, altered photos, bondage, facility, drugs, violence, simulated sexual acts, etc. Quantity of Photos: \_\_\_\_\_
- ☐ No Internet/web site printouts pertaining to crimes of inmates or material which may compromise the order and security of the facility and no Facebook posts.
- ☐ No Social Security Card; Driver's License or I.D. card; School or employment I.D., etc of any one else.
- ☐ Banned Publication per Springfield Pub. Review Committee: \_\_\_\_\_

- ☐ No duplicates of any kind, no game dials.

Other: "We the People - Legal Primer" Booklet

- ☒ Money voucher is required ☒ Manila envelope is needed ☐ Write-out needed

**IF YOU DO NOT RESPOND TO THIS NOTICE WITHIN 30 DAYS, THE ITEMS WILL BE DESTROYED.****Indicate one of the following:**

- ☐ I have provided a stamped, addressed envelope to return the item (**ATTACH FORM TO OUTSIDE OF RESPONSE**) ITEM MUST BE RETURNED TO SENDER UNLESS TOLD OTHERWISE.
- ☐ I wish to have the above listed items destroyed.
- ☐ Other: \_\_\_\_\_

Be advised, if you do not return this form, the above item will be disposed of in accordance with DR 501.230.

Individual's Signature and Number \_\_\_\_\_

Date \_\_\_\_\_

I.R.C.C. Mailroom Staff [Signature]

Dis: White - Individual in Custody  
 Yellow - Mailroom  
 Pink - With Item

IRI 0065 (Revised 05/2023)



Better to be ignorant of a  
matter than to half know it. Better  
know better to be better

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than to half know it. Better to know  
of a matter than to half know it.

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