

American Prison Writing Archive  
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## The mighty Pen

As everyone knows (or at least should) violence only results in negative consequences. So the old adage, "The pen is mightier than the sword," is still true. This is even more so now with the internet. Governments know this, and so often take steps to "censor" communication.

Here, in the United States of America our 1st Constitutional Amendment is our right to freedom of speech; one of the most important of our Civil Rights.

Recently here in Michigan the prison system, (Michigan Dept. of Corrections - MDOC), has taken steps that threaten this very important right - freedom of speech. Using the guise of "costs" (and "security") of incarceration, steps of MDOC policy change were implemented to cause a "reduction" of incoming prisoner mail. But before this policy change electronic tablets were offered to prisoners, initially at half price, that have a (controlled) e-mail ability. (So certainly there was no increase in "snail" mail), of course all outgoing and incoming e-mails are censored. And these e-mails are cheaper to send than snail mail. (Other reasons exist for tablet introduction - but that is a whole another essay in itself).

The policy for incoming mail was changed, it was said, because of drugs being brought thru it. Those changes include: (1) incoming envelopes (with return addresses) are no longer allowed in (address or not). So unless person writing you puts their return address on letter, you may not be

able to write back. (2) No pictures are allowed in printed on photo paper (3) No writing of any kind except in pencil, blue or black pen, (or typed) is allowed (your kids color crayon drawings can't be recieved). (4) Cards sent can't have glitter or anything on them. So how is all this not a deturent to writing a simple letter? You have to go thru all these steps just to write. Isn't that the point of letter writing; its simple? But when it isn't so are you going to want to write?

The Mail policy change is geared toward reducing incoming mail <sup>and</sup> its processing costs (except now letters are transferred to envelopes of whose costs are put on prisoners). But this also pushes people towards the use of e-mail (which has 2-way censoring). ~~What happens~~

What happens when snail mail is no longer allowed? What ability will prisoners have to "report" mistreatments. Another "Slippery Slope", as lawyers say, is being created here which threatens our 1st Amendment Right.

Already the 1st "power" prisoners have to remedy mistreatments, the 1st Amendment right to grieve the government, is being greatly dimenished. (One of the many policies the MDOC isn't following concerns grievances.) Grievances (the state remedy exhaustion requirement for a law suit in Michigan) are routinely rejected for reasons not within policy. (This adds a legal need to address the rejection in a suit.) And writing a grievance against the coordinator not properly performing thier job, within policy, is (of course) rejected by them, themselves. Who anywhere

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gets to be their own judge?!!!

The MDOC's efforts to "cover up" their lack of policy enforcement includes stating grievances (as a majority) are frivolous, when, truth is they just don't want to correct the problems being addressed. And, many times, it costs the state (taxpayers) more, by not dealing with the problem at the "local" level, in the long run: <sup>This</sup> Because a suit ~~that~~ <sup>can</sup> follow, to "cure" the problem, that should not have been needed in the ~~1st~~ first place had policy simply have been followed.

And why aren't the MDOC policies followed? Well it takes work to enforce rules: effort is required! Excuses: prisoners won't like you; will have paper work to do; don't agree with the rule; none of it matters anyway - they are just criminals; and more. Real reason: people are lazy - no one wants to work any harder than they can get away with! We've become a lax society!!! But these very excuses being used here are forms of the behaviors that resulted in the very incarcerations the policies are in place to control. (So why do we as a society just continue to chase our tails???)

A good start to discontinuing the unreasonable (insane) tail chasing would be to enforce the policies and rules in prison. Seems to me like society, as a whole, would have a lot to gain if this was only done - but it's <sup>not</sup> being done in Michigan's prisons! (and probably other states as well). And by not enforcing rules the result is reinforced values of rule breaking, which only reinforces the irrational, unsustainable

Concept of long-term incarceration - or is that the whole idea: a justification of means to an end? !!!

When an acceptance is gained that our "prisons, (at least the system I'm in, in Michigan), are not meeting the expected standard of "changing" someone's life to have socially acceptable behaviors, only then will a needed change occur. Because without this change we will only continue to "warehouse" people at great costs to our society of more than money. Society will continue on its downward spiral, and incarceration will only serve to further that spin downward - as it does now!!!

Start by following policy and enforcing prison rules! (Especially since not following rules is the reason for imprisonment in the place). Next, give incentive of earlier release when the rules are followed by prisoners. And then put in place someone that those tasked with following policy and enforcing the rules has to be accountable to. Also, ensure that there is an uncensored way to report mistreatments and policy not being followed, without retaliation for doing such. NOT ROCKET SCIENCE!!!

Right now there is so much retaliation when prisoners make complaints of policy and rules not being followed by the MDOC that many prisoners stop their complaints, even though they are valid. Michigan has an upper Peninsula which has short summers, long cold winters - lots of snow and rain and wind for the better part of the year. Its those prisons "up" there (here) that are used for prisoners typically with disciplinary problems. Unfortunately, to MDOC employees "problems" also mean those making ~~com~~ valid complaints of policy and rule violations.

Many MDOC prisoners (like me) are sent "North" as retaliation for exercising their 1st Amendment right to grieve the (MDOC) government. (Of course this will never be admitted to - other reasons will be given for a transfer - I was "traded" with a prisoner who needed to go down-state for a valid reason - but picking me for the trade out of the 1400 others at the Lakeland Correctional Facility, was not coincidental and I can prove it. (But to pursue is nearly impossible - the grievance I sent was never acknowledged (imagine that?). Many other prisoners have told me the same has been done to them.

Michigan has a Legislative Ombudsman empowered to deal with prisoner mistreatments. Because of "costs" they are (of course) understaffed, underfunded. They may ~~decide~~ "decide" to investigate a complaint - but there is no requirement to do so. And the prisons "hide" behind "security" to cover their "mistakes", so proving anything is nearly impossible. So prisoners (in Michigan at least) are put in the position of having to "put up" with (or else), even when trying to do the right thing of changing their lives.

All of this can change as previously mentioned: Require (with consequence) all policies and rules are followed and enforced - with oversight, a way to confidentially report violations, and give an incentive for good behavior or early release fairly implemented. And a better world will result, as a whole!