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SUBJECT: Privileges vs. Rights Article
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Have you ever stopped to really consider what are your rights as a human being? How about as an American? Or what about as a Pennsylvanian? I often sit back and wonder what exactly are my rights currently as an inmate? What will my rights be as a convicted felon upon my release back to society?

We often take for granted the things we have readily available to use, and bundle together our privileges with our rights. When I say we, I mean all people in a general sense. Take for example what's been going on with social media lately. Many people felt they had the "right" to say or do whatever they please via platforms such as Twitter or Facebook, that was their "right". Right? Until popular social networks began seriously monitoring and filtering posts, and even going as far as suspending or banning accounts. It was then realized it was ultimately a privilege to exercise that human right.

Prisoner's rights is a constant battle fought both behind the wall and from the free world. A notable, and memorable account happened in a prison in Attica. The prisoners in Attica went on to speak up and voice their opinions on deserving of basic necessities, such as clean water and edible food. They weren't protesting for iPads or furloughs, but something I'm sure we all can agree humans should have easy accessibility to. After a valiant effort and days of clashing heavily with law enforcement, the protest was brutally put to an end, but not without getting their message heard first.

Today, prisoner's rights and activists groups continue to fight the good fight. Not only do they make sure these bare necessities are provided and kept at all times, but they even go as far as to assist in proving the once found guilty as innocent. But sometimes, even these groups begin to misidentify the difference between a privilege and a right.

Whenever I first found myself in county jail, nearly a decade ago, I was told I have the right to three hots and a cot. Nothing more, nothing less. Basically as long as I'm fed three times a day and am given a place to sleep each night, this is all the jail is required to provide for me. To be honest, I've never been too upset with this, I do realize that I did in fact break the law and put myself in jail. As long as they help me maintain basic human survival, what else could I really ask for? This mindset has helped me grow in my situation today.

A county jail and federal institution are vastly different on so many levels. Most notable would be the privileges available in the feds as opposed to the county jail. These include but are not limited to; contact visits, warehouse jobs, e-mail access, weights and exercise equipment, and early half-way house placement. If one of these are instantly stripped from us, many inmates begin to react in a rebellious manner. But is that really appropriate? Or should we take a second to remember where we are?

Personally, I am extremely grateful for the privileges provided for me here at the institution. I have used them to benefit and grow within myself beyond belief. Do I enjoy calling and e-mailing my wife on a daily basis? Absolutely. But when these things are currently unavailable I make it through it, without placing the blame or holding specific resentment towards anybody.

I understand that upon my release some of my rights such as that to vote or own firearms are now invalid. And I'm alright with that. But there's one thing as a human that can not be taken from me, a right to happiness. With the life I've began to develop and build today, I do in fact have the right to be happy. And I have the privilege today to share that I will succeed in doing just that.