

NEWS RELEASE

Human Rights Defense Center
For Immediate Release

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Human Rights Defense Center Sheds Light on Censored Books in Florida's Prison System

Lake Worth, FL – The Human Rights Defense Center (HRDC) has received an extensive list of books and magazines that are currently banned by Florida prisons as “a threat to security.” Publications banned by Florida prisons for alleged security threats include self-help guides for prisoners, Stephen Colbert’s *America Again: Re-Becoming the Greatness We Never Weren’t*, coloring books and a Klingon dictionary. In response to this list, HRDC calls for a wholesale revamping of Florida prison mail rooms, the publications review committee and their practices and policies to ensure that censorship is the exception and not the rule.

Prominent on the list of censored publications are titles with relevance to the experience and needs of people who are incarcerated in Florida. As this list demonstrates, prisons improperly broaden the use of “threats to security” to include information that could help prisoners understand their experiences with incarceration or seek political or legal help. Moreover, books that discuss or criticize brutality, corruption, misconduct and racism in the criminal justice system in general and prisons in particular are singled out for censorship. Issues of two monthly magazines published by HRDC, *Prison Legal News* and *Criminal Legal News*, appear multiple times and have been banned in Florida prisons for over a decade. Also banned are:

- [The Disciplinary Self-Help Litigation Manual](#), a comprehensive reference book to educate prisoners about their rights in prison disciplinary hearings;
- [The Federal Prison Handbook](#), written by a former federal prisoner and intended as an insider’s view to successfully guide prisoners through the federal prison system;
- [23/7: Pelican Bay Prison and the Rise of Long-Term Solitary Confinement](#), Keramet Reiter’s lauded examination of the increased use of solitary confinement; and
- “Coming Out of Concrete Closets,” a factual report on the experiences of LGBTQ prisoners published by prisoners’ rights organization Black and Pink.

“The sheer breadth and wide-ranging scope of prison censorship in Florida is astounding but it should come as no surprise that a prison system that routinely murders and rapes its prisoners with impunity would also routinely trample the free speech rights of those prisoners and the publishers that wish to communicate with them,” said Paul Wright, executive director of the Human Rights Defense Center.

Among other publications improperly banned by the Florida Department of Corrections due to alleged security threats:

- [Dictionary of Computer and Internet Terms](#);
- [Danish: A Complete Guide for Beginners](#);
- [Exotic Chickens: Coloring for Everyone: A Fun Anti-stress Coloring Book](#);
- [America Again: Re-Becoming the Greatness We Never Weren’t](#) (Stephen Colbert); and
- [Advanced Dungeons & Dragons](#).

Michelle Dillon, HRDC's public records manager, added upon reviewing this list, "Books are incredible tools for education and self-empowerment, and the removal of these tools is a pressing issue for prisoners across the country. We have discovered through our efforts to uncover prison book bans this year, for example, that Kansas alone has banned more than 7,000 books. And when you see a list like this one from the Florida Department of Corrections, where coloring books have been bizarrely deemed 'security threats,' you start to understand there is a serious nationwide need for better standards and oversight in what prisoners are allowed to read."

HRDC previously addressed widespread censorship in Florida prisons through litigation in an effort to restore access to *Prison Legal News* to state prisoners. Although HRDC's petition [to the U.S. Supreme Court](#) in 2018 was ultimately denied, the efforts to challenge prison censorship in Florida [drew support](#) from varied groups including prison book programs, media organizations, law professors and more. With the release of the list of banned books in Florida, HRDC intends to continue its campaign to ensure fair access to reading materials in prisons nationwide.

To see the list of censored books in Florida as well as banned book lists from other states, including lists gathered by HRDC during this project, click [here](#).

The Human Rights Defense Center, founded in 1990 and based in Lake Worth, Florida, is a non-profit organization dedicated to protecting human rights in U.S. detention facilities. In addition to advocating on behalf of prisoners and publishing books and magazines concerning the criminal justice system, HRDC engages in state and federal court litigation on prisoners' rights issues, including wrongful deaths, public records, class actions and Section 1983 civil rights cases.

For further information, please contact:

Paul Wright, Executive Director
Human Rights Defense Center
(561) 360-2523
pwright@prisonlegalnews.org

Alex Friedmann, Associate Director
Human Rights Defense Center
(615) 495-6568
afriedmann@prisonlegalnews.org