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Mary Rasenberger

October 19, 2018

John E. Wetzel

Secretary of Corrections

Pennsylvania Department of Corrections

1920 Technology Parkway

Mechanicsburg, PA 17050

Re: Policy Number DC-ADM 803

Dear Secretary Wetzel:

The Authors Guild is the oldest and largest professional organization of United States authors. Our 10,000 members include prizewinning novelists, historians, journalists, poets, scholars, and other traditionally and independently published authors. We advocate for authors on issues of public and professional concern, not the least of which is free speech.

We are writing you today to voice our serious concerns about the Pennsylvania Department of Corrections' recent decision to create a policy preventing friends, family, or charitable organizations from sending books directly to prisoners, forcing them to purchase tablets at a cost of \$147 at a time when the wages of the average Pennsylvania prisoner are between \$0.19 and \$1 per hour. By prohibiting inmates from receiving books from any source other than the DOC and a single ebook vendor that charges higher than market prices, you are effectively banning millions of books and other publications from Pennsylvania correctional facilities. You are forcing inmates to pay for ebooks even when digital copies of those same books are available for free through Project Gutenberg.

The egregious new policy also prevents charities like Books Through Bars or Book'Em from sending free books and donations to correctional facilities. These programs have allowed incarcerated persons to gain vocational skills, learn languages, and expand their knowledge. The purported rationale for this policy is protecting correctional staff from exposure to drugs; yet your own records fail to mention even a single incident where contraband drugs entered Pennsylvania correctional facilities through books donated by charities.

Last but not least, by restricting the flow of books into correctional facilities, DC-ADM 803 puts a special burden on media writ large. As the United States Supreme Court announced in *Turner v. Safley*, “Prison walls do not form a barrier separating prison inmates from the protections of the Constitution.” While correctional departments have broad discretion over rules and regulations at correctional facilities, regulations that impinge inmates’ fundamental rights must be rationally related to a legitimate penological interest. We are hard pressed to find such an interest behind DC-ADM 803 to vindicate its severe curtailment of speech.

Books and newspapers lie at the bedrock of our culture. Our constitution ardently protects their free movement and circulation. For these reasons, we respectfully request that you revoke this policy immediately.

Sincerely,

Mary E. Rasenberger
Executive Director

Cheryl David
General Counsel