

Books Through Bars
c/o Bluestocking Bookstore
172 Allen Street
New York, NY 10002

NYC BOARD OF CORRECTION

APR 26 '07 PM 1:46

April 24, 2007

Richard T. Wolf
Executive Director
New York City Board of Correction
51 Chambers Street #923
New York, NY 10007

Dear Mr. Wolf:

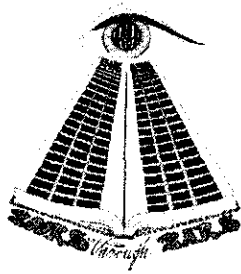
Books Through Bars-New York City is an all-volunteer program that sends books free of charge to prisoners in New York City and across the state and country. We are writing to submit comments on some of the proposed amendments to the minimum standards for New York City correctional facilities.

Our primary focus is on sections 1-12 (packages) and 1-13 (publications).

The addition of a vague and open-ended criterion in both sections 1-12 and 1-13 of "except when there is a reasonable belief that limitation is necessary to protect public safety or maintain facility order and security" is potentially dangerous. Censorship has always been a more serious risk when a library, school, jail or other institution screening reading material fails to provide clear, topic-specific information about what readers cannot have access to in that institution. Each Correction Officer in the City Jails may interpret the proposed regulation his or her own way, leading to gross inconsistency between facilities.

We are also concerned that this lack of specificity does not give clear guidance to the public to judge what is intended and thus responsibly comment. The public cannot measure the fairness of a restriction it cannot reasonably interpret. This same lack of clarity may hamper the ability of family, friends and programs like ourselves in helping inmates and detainees access resources not available or provided by the Department of Corrections. The City of New York Board of Correction should re-open this topic, and the others discussed below, and clearly state the intentions of the Department of Corrections in drafting this language.

We urge the City of New York Board of Correction to revisit these vital structures that allow inmates and detainees to access resources that directly affect their ability to adequately assist in their own defense and to improve their educational status.



Books Through Bars
c/o Bluestocking Bookstore
172 Allen Street
New York, NY 10002

In addition to the issues above that directly affect our organization's operations, other amendments merit attention:

*The amendments lack provisions to ensure that transgender and gender-variant visitors whose identification may not match their dress or appearance gain entry to appropriate facilities, and the amendments do not address the issue of gender segregated bathrooms. Similarly, they lack specific protections for the inmates and detainees themselves, consistent with city law.

* The amendments regarding the increased use of 23-hour lockdown for inmates who are being kept segregated for administrative rather than punitive reasons are unjust and unnecessary, and they are likely to result in an increased incidence of serious mental illness in the City Jails, including suicide attempts.

*The amendments lack a clear plan to address how speakers of languages other than English will be ensured the ability to communicate with staff.

Sincerely,

Victoria Law
Melissa Morrone
Anika Paris
Jessica Ross
Daniel R Schaffer

On behalf of the Books Through Bars Collective