

United States Senate  
WASHINGTON, DC 20510

September 27, 2024

Ms. Colette Peters  
Director  
Federal Bureau of Prisons  
320 First Street NW  
Washington, D.C. 20534

Dear Director Peters:

This week is Banned Books Week, which was launched in 1982 to draw attention to the harms of censorship and to support the freedom to read.<sup>1</sup> We believe access to reading in your facilities is an important tool to support the Federal Bureau of Prisons' mission: to provide a "secure environment and ensure public safety by preparing individuals for successful reentry into our communities."<sup>2</sup>

Reading supports rehabilitation and reentry for incarcerated individuals.<sup>3</sup> Approximately 41% of incarcerated individuals do not have a high school diploma,<sup>4</sup> but those who participate in any kind of educational program are 43% less likely to recidivate.<sup>5</sup> Access to books in prisons makes our prisons, and our communities, safer.

Under the Bureau's policy, wardens may reject a publication only if they determine it is "detrimental to the security, good order, or discipline . . . or if it might facilitate criminal activity."<sup>6</sup> Amid reports that this policy is being abused,<sup>7</sup> and that access to books in our prisons

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<sup>1</sup> Banned Books Week: Sept. 22-28, 2024, AM. LIBRARY ASS., <https://www.ala.org/bbooks/banned>.

<sup>2</sup> ORGANIZATION, MISSION AND FUNCTIONS MANUAL, FEDERAL BUREAU OF PRISONS, U.S. DEP'T JUST., <https://www.justice.gov/doj/federal-bureau-prisons>.

<sup>3</sup> See Christopher Blackwell, *Reading While Incarcerated Saved Me. So Why Are Prisons Banning Books?*, N.Y. TIMES (Aug. 17, 2022), <https://www.nytimes.com/2022/08/17/opinion/banned-books-prison.html>.

<sup>4</sup> Kathleen Bender, *Education Opportunities in Prison Are Key to Reducing Crime*, CTR. AM. PROGRESS (MAR. 20, 2018), <https://www.americanprogress.org/article/education-opportunities-prison-key-reducing-crime/>.

<sup>5</sup> LOIS M. DAVIS ET AL., HOW EFFECTIVE IS CORRECTIONAL EDUCATION, AND WHERE DO WE GO FROM HERE? (2014) [https://www.rand.org/pubs/research\\_reports/RR564.html](https://www.rand.org/pubs/research_reports/RR564.html).

<sup>6</sup> U.S. Department of Justice, Federal Bureau of Prisons, Incoming Publications Program Statement P5266.11, Approved by Thomas R. Kane, Acting Director (Nov. 9, 2011), (available at [https://www.bop.gov/policy/progstat/5266\\_011.pdf](https://www.bop.gov/policy/progstat/5266_011.pdf)).

<sup>7</sup> See MOIRA MARQUIS & JULIANA LUNA, READING BETWEEN THE BARS: AN IN-DEPTH LOOK AT PRISON CENSORSHIP (Pen America 2023), <https://pen.org/report/reading-between-the-bars>.

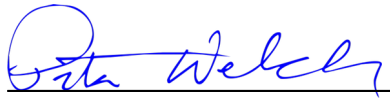
Ms. Colette Peters

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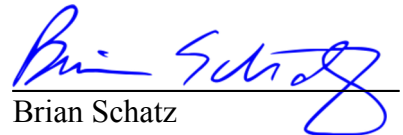
is falling generally,<sup>8</sup> we would appreciate your help as we work to gather more information. To this end, we are requesting the following information:

1. Please provide a list of publications rejected at any BOP facility in 2023.
2. In the last five years, how many total publications were rejected by BOP facilities?
3. Do your facilities reject publications because they come from certain donors, bookstores, community organizations, or publishers? If so, please provide a list.
4. How many books are rejected for content-neutral reasons on a yearly basis? (for example, because they were used, donated, paperback, hardcover, not from an approved vendor, or involved ad hoc mailing procedures)
5. Do you provide wardens, correctional officers, and mailing staff with guidance, beyond that in Program Statement P5266.11, on how to determine if a publication is “detrimental to the security, good order, or discipline . . . or if it might facilitate criminal activity?” If so, please provide that guidance.

Sincerely,



Peter Welch  
United States Senator



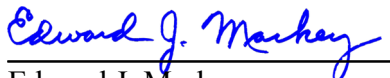
Brian Schatz  
United States Senator



Raphael Warnock  
United States Senator



Chris Van Hollen  
United States Senator



Edward J. Markey  
United States Senator



Ron Wyden  
United States Senator

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<sup>8</sup> Hope Corrigan, *Used Paperbacks Change Lives Behind Bars, Even With Growing Prison Book Bans*, WASH. POST (Jun. 3, 2024, 5:55 AM), <https://www.washingtonpost.com/lifestyle/2024/05/29/prison-book-ban-through-bars/>.

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A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Dick Durbin". The signature is written in a cursive style with a horizontal line underneath it.

Richard J. Durbin  
United States Senator