

June 12,2019

Dear Senator Booker,

Thank you for this opportunity to provide you with a glimpse inside the federal Bureau of Prisons (BOP). As a prisoner for almost 12-years I've been given a front row seat to its inner workings. One area where the BOP has consistently disappointed me is in the realm of education. And as I will explain, it is not a lack of money but rather will power which is to blame.

A particularly destructive policy is the rule that an inmate is only allowed to have in his possession 5-books. Thankfully, this rule is only half-heartedly enforced. In Allenwood LSCI inmates may store over 5-books in their lockers, but on their desks are limited to 5-per each inmate in the room. This doesn't sound too bad until one sees how small the lockers are and takes into account that all of an inmate's personal belongings must be stored within it.

About four months ago I began studying Spanish. Just for this one subject I've acquired 6-books, some of which are quite large. Placing even a few books on the desk in the room renders it all but useless as it only measures approximately 24" x 18". Installing a bookshelf in each room would be a simple and cheap way to rectify this issue along with increasing the number of books an inmate may possess. Of course, introducing e-books or tablets, as so many state prison systems have already done, would also make a lot of sense. Unfortunately, knowing from experience how the BOP moves at a glacial pace there is no telling how many years it would take before an inmate could purchase one.

Also of concern is the fact that there are no return boxes for library books on the housing units. As a consequence of this I've seen a good number of books thrown in the trash. The only place for books is the mailbox and this is supposed to be kept free of items per prison policy.

A simple solution would be to place small moveable book carts on each housing unit in order to keep books from being thrown away and at the same time this would encourage more reading since books would now be readily available. I floated this idea to the Supervisor of Education, N. Yarnell, in March of this year. He roundly rejected this idea because as he wrote, "the walk to the library from any housing unit is really not that far" and "it would make little sense for the Education Department to set up 'Satellite' library carts in housing units, which would just end up contributing to the clutter..." The head of our "education department" equating books with clutter, go figure. (A copy of this email is attached.)

It is also worth noting that the library itself is much too small for a compound of 1,300 prisoners. There are less than 50 seats at the various tables in the main sitting room. While there are a number of classrooms these are kept locked unless being used for classes. The result is that for most of the day the library resembles a Walmart on Black Friday more than a place of quiet study.

In 2012 MP3s were sold to the inmate population. According to the BOP these devices were being made available, among other reasons, to bring educational materials to prisoners. As you can see in the attached essay this promise was never kept. The BOP's idea of what constitutes "educational material" and the average person's are wildly different.

It would be incredibly easy to have inmates volunteer to record audio books and then offer these MP3 tracks to inmates free of charge to encourage literacy. There are a lot of guys in here who have difficulty

reading and having someone read the words for them might just be what they need to boost their confidence. Instead of that we have the current policy which is to provide an extremely limited number of audio books and these at exorbitant rates. For example, Mark Twain's novel, A Connecticut Yankee In King Arthur's Court*, is available for \$1.20 per chapter. Yet there are at least 112 chapters listed on the MP3 library**. Would anyone actually pay \$134.40 to hear this book? I'd also like to point out that the printed novel has only 44 chapters.

*The title of this book is incorrectly listed in the MP3 library as "A Yankee at the Court of King Arthur (Unabridged)"

**The MP3 tracks of this novel are not listed in order for some reason and the highest chapter number I could find was 112.

Lastly, I'd like to bring your attention to an exciting educational venture called Khan Academy, that also happens to be free. They are international, highly respected, and most importantly for our purposes, already provide educational opportunities for incarcerated individuals. According to the information provided on their website (see attached) an offline version of Khan Academy, known as Khan Lite, is being utilized by the Idaho Department of Corrections along with inmates in Washington state. The Santa Clara County Office of Education is using the online version for its correctional education programs as well as Los Angeles County Jails.

Given that the BOP has switched to computerized GED testing, computer labs already exist in its institutions. This allows a minimal amount of time or money to be necessary in order to implement Khan Lite. The number of different courses they offer is quite amazing as you can see in the attached information.

Senator Booker, what the BOP needs more than anything else is oversight. The fact that no affordable educational material exists on the MP3 players is the best evidence of this. As a prisoner I can only do so much. In prison the squeaky wheel doesn't get the grease, he gets "diesel therapy" (thrown on a bus for a cross country tour of nearly every county jail on the map).

Sincerely,

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