

# Prison Book Censorship Is on the Rise

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*“Don’t attribute to malice what can be explained by incompetence.”*

When it comes to prison officials and books, it is hard to believe that saying is true. Every day there seems to be a new story about prisons refusing to accept book donations to incarcerated people. In the last few months alone, Pennsylvania, Washington, and Ohio have enacted book bans. These follow in the footsteps of New York, the federal government, and Maryland – and there may well be more. The good news is that these policies generate a public outcry and the prison officials ultimately back down. But the first time one of these bans sticks, other states are bound to try again.

Kansas is the censorship champion. [Books to Prisoners](#), a Seattle-based non-profit that sends books to incarcerated people across the country, reports the Kansas [banned book list has over 7,000 titles](#). It’s no surprise that Kansas prison officials would argue they have to monitor reading material and confiscate obvious security threats (*Hacking Electronics*, or *the CIA Lockpicking Manual* are banned for instance). But it is hard to see why *Bon Appetit* magazine or *Computers for Seniors for Dummies* would pose a threat to prison order. Ditto the *Game of Thrones* series. The banning of books critiquing mass incarceration goes beyond buffoonery. Kansas has banned the flyer “Five corporations you’ve never heard of are making millions from mass incarceration” and *The Abolitionist* magazine, to give two examples. Incarcerated people have the right to know who is profiting off of their imprisonment. If Kansas is worried about prison unrest, it should end the exploitation rather than preventing incarcerated people from reading about it.