

New York City Board of Correction

1 Centre St., Room 2213

New York, NY 1007

*Sent via email*

Re: DOC request for variances regarding mail and packages

Dear Members of the Board,

I am a social worker who has been working with people incarcerated on Rikers island for the past fourteen years, in criminal defense settings. I am writing to you today about one more downside of the proposed package restrictions—so many less books. Through the years, I have seen social worker and attorney colleagues at the agencies where I have worked send out dozens of books each month. When I meet clients who are incarcerated, “Would you like any books sent?” is a question that and I and so many of my coworkers always ask. In the offices where I have worked, donating used books to communal bookshelves has been a common practice. I also have neighbors and loved ones constantly giving me books for this reason and I have always appreciated that this is a connection between the general public and those detained at Rikers. It’s hard for those who work outside the legal system to understand what it’s like to be in jail but they can understand what it’s like to love books and the joy of escaping in a book. I have learned so much about my clients and built stronger relationships with them through our discussion of these books. Some books simply entertain and others have made a profound impact and shifted the way my client sees their life or the possibilities that exist in this world. I know there are many other legal professionals in this city that have been sending many books informally in this way. If the policies were to change and books can only be sent by vendors, the cost will be prohibitive and this practice will cease. My heart breaks thinking about how many less books will find their way into people’s hands. If you love books, I hope you feel this way too.

These proposed restrictions would also be devastating in so many larger ways--in the ways that so much is lost through the lack of tangible written letters from loved ones, that age old connection through letters simply flattened onto tablets versus being able to be held in one’s hand as a transitional object and to experience their feel and smell and see the colors of art or a photo through one’s full senses. I believe this and the huge cost to families of using vendors to send items are both profound and fully compelling reasons to oppose these restrictions. In my experience, this Board is full of thoughtful

humanists who care about promoting the dignity and personhood of those who are incarcerated at Rikers Island and it is therefore my deepest hope that you all will block this draconian and wrong-headed proposition.

Thank you for listening. Again, stopping these little-known but beautiful streams of books is far from the biggest reason to veto the package restrictions but it is yet another important consideration to add to your list. If you have any questions, I would be happy to elaborate further on any of the topics above.

I urge the Board to deny the Department's variance request.

Sincerely,

Susanna Eckblad, LCSW