

PRESS RELEASE

Human Rights Defense Center
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Publisher Challenges Censorship of Prison Legal News by Two Maryland Jails

MARYLAND – The non-profit organization Human Rights Defense Center (HRDC) has filed two lawsuits in the District Court of Maryland to challenge censorship by Prince George’s County Correctional Center (PGCCC) and Montgomery County Correctional Center (MCCC) in Maryland. The lawsuits allege ongoing censorship of books, magazines, and mail sent to prisoners at the jails, in violation of the First Amendment and the Fourteenth Amendment.

HRDC publishes two monthly educational publications, *Prison Legal News* and *Criminal Legal News*, which were mailed to prisoners at the jails along with legal books and other educational materials. According to the complaints, written policies at PGCCC prohibit mailed books and magazines, while policies at MCCC prohibit all publications in the form of books, and both jails have failed to provide HRDC notice and an opportunity to appeal the broad and unconstitutional censorship. Mail policies for the jails can be accessed on the websites for [PGCCC](#) and [MCCC](#).

HRDC has identified at least 142 items that were rejected by PGCCC and 19 books that were rejected by MCCC, including issues of *Prison Legal News*, *Criminal Legal News*, copies of *Protecting Your Health and Safety*, and copies of *Prisoners’ Handbook*. According to the complaints, *Prisoners’ Handbook* provides prisoners information on enrolling at accredited higher educational, vocational and training school, and [Protecting Your Health and Safety](#) describes the rights and legal remedies available to prisoners concerning their incarceration.

In these complaints, HRDC alleges violations of its constitutional rights under the free speech clause of the First Amendment and under the Fourteenth Amendment’s right to due process. As a result of these rejections, HRDC claims that it has suffered damages including “the suppression of HRDC’s speech; the impediment of HRDC’s ability to disseminate its political message;” and “frustration of HRDC’s non-profit organizational mission.”

The complaints name Prince George’s County and Montgomery County, as well as Mary Lou McDonough and Suzy Malagari, the Director of Prince George’s County Department of Corrections and the Warden of Montgomery County Department of Correction and Rehabilitation, respectively, as defendants. Defendants are accused of responsibility for, or personal participation in, “creating and implementing these unconstitutional policies, practices, and customs,” as well as training other staff in these procedures.

“HRDC’s books and magazines inform prisoners about educational opportunities, their constitutional rights, and means for self-improvement while incarcerated,” noted HRDC General Counsel Daniel Marshall. “Banning these publications from reaching those who are in jail is an affront to the First Amendment, as well as counterproductive to the goals of security and rehabilitation.”

HRDC is seeking declaratory relief, injunctive relief to prohibit defendants from refusing to deliver mail from HRDC and other senders, compensatory and punitive damages, and attorneys' fees and costs.

HRDC is represented by attorneys Ronald London and Courtney DeThomas with the Washington, DC law firm of Davis Wright Tremaine, LLP, as well as HRDC general counsel Daniel Marshall. The cases are [*Human Rights Defense Center v. Montgomery County et al.*](#), D. Md, Case No. 8:20-cv-381 and [*Human Rights Defense Center v. Prince George's County et al.*](#), D. Md., Case No. 8:20-cv-379.

The Human Rights Defense Center, founded in 1990 and based in Lake Worth, Florida, is a non-profit organization dedicated to protecting human rights in U.S. detention facilities. HRDC publishes *Prison Legal News* (PLN) and *Criminal Legal News* (CLN), two monthly magazines that includes reports, reviews and analysis of court rulings and news related to prisoners' rights and criminal justice issues. PLN has thousands of subscribers nationwide and operates a website (www.prisonlegalnews.org) that includes a comprehensive database of prison and jail-related articles, news reports, court rulings, verdicts, settlements and related documents.

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