

# BEYOND THE BARS

# CRIMINAL JUSTICE INSIGHTS



## MEET OUR VISIONARY:

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## BALANCING ACT: PROS AND CONS OF RESTRICTING READING MATERIALS IN PRISONS

As a former Prison Health Services Administrator and an educator deeply committed to inmate rehabilitation, I view the recent decision to restrict reading material orders in Missouri's prisons with a mix of understanding and concern. It's important to acknowledge the security concerns that prison staff and administrators face daily. Contraband and the potential influence of harmful ideologies within correctional facilities are genuine issues that must be addressed. However, it's equally vital to recognize the undeniable benefits that access to reading materials offers to incarcerated individuals.

From my experience, I've witnessed how reading can be a lifeline for inmates seeking personal growth and transformation. Educational and self-improvement resources can be powerful tools for rehabilitation. By allowing inmates to engage with literature, we provide them with opportunities for mental escape, stress reduction, and skill development. Studies have shown that access to reading materials can reduce recidivism rates, ultimately benefiting society as a whole.

For context here, the safety and security concerns raised by restrictions on reading materials in prisons primarily revolve around the potential for contraband and the influence of certain materials on inmate behavior. Some key points to consider would include contraband, the possible introduction of influence of extremist or harmful ideologies, unapproved communications, maintaining order and discipline, and resource allocation.

To strike a balance, it's crucial to implement effective screening processes, clear guidelines for approved materials, and regular monitoring to mitigate security risks. We must ensure that the restrictions placed on reading materials do not hinder rehabilitation efforts. Providing carefully curated, educational resources can empower inmates to improve themselves, reduce their chances of reoffending, and enhance their prospects for successful reintegration into society. Balancing security concerns with the principles of rehabilitation is essential to creating safer and more transformative correctional environments.