



New Prison Mail Policies Threaten Newsletters by and for Incarcerated People

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On September 3, Illinois prison officials moved — by emergency rule — to replace most [physical mail with scanned copies](#), though a key legislative panel has already pushed back. At the same time, New York is [installing mail scanners in prisons](#), raising alarms about privacy and attorney-client privilege. Texas has already shifted to “[digital mail](#),” where letters are scanned and delivered on tablets or as photocopies. Though billed as a way to reduce contraband, these “paperless” policies constrict how people read, write, and organize behind prison walls.

Protecting incarcerated people’s access to physical mail and inside-led print publishing is a feminist public safety issue. These letters and publications sustain dignity, care, legal literacy, and organizing. This is perhaps most clearly exemplified by [The Fire Inside](#), a physical newsletter written by, for, and about people in women’s prisons that digitized, heavily surveilled systems would otherwise stifle or erase. And as [PEN America](#) has documented, prisons now block “staggering numbers” of books and other reading materials for arbitrary reasons, from content to even the color of wrapping paper. In that environment, a physical newsletter written by, for, and about people in women’s prisons is exactly the kind of publication digitized, heavily surveilled systems can stifle or erase.