



Freedom to Learn Campaign (IL)

Higher education in prison transforms lives. It produces personal, social, and economic benefits for incarcerated individuals, their families, and the broader society. To achieve its full potential, college-in prison programs must operate under supportive conditions.

The Freedom to Learn Campaign, out of Illinois, calls for clear and fair statewide policies that allow incarcerated students to pursue their studies free from undue interference or interruption of academic and intellectual pursuits. College-in-prison programs must be free to provide their students with safe and dignified learning environments. It is in the public's interest to protect and expand incarcerated people's ability to learn, read, think, and grow while serving out their sentences.

In particular, the Freedom to Learn Campaign advocates for:

1. Freedom to Pursue Higher Education While in Prison.

Practices vary across Illinois' prisons, with some facilities offering no opportunity at all for incarcerated individuals to take college classes and others offering only restricted access to such programming. Policies that expand access to college programs and support efficient day-to-day operations of these programs best serve our state's interests. All academically eligible students should be able to enroll in college, with no bar based upon length of sentence, age, or criminal charges.

2. Freedom from Transfer.

Transfers between facilities are common within Illinois, frequently to free up bed space or when a person's security level changes. Transfers can happen without notice or warning. Unfortunately, academic progress is compromised when a student is transferred from a prison where they've been enrolled in an educational program into a facility that doesn't

Supporters

Organizations

A New Way of Life | Black and Pink, Chicago Chapter | Business and Professional People for the Public Interest, | Cabrini Green Legal Aid | Chicago Area Fair Housing Alliance | Chicago Community Bond Fund | Community Renewal Society | CURE IL | First Followers | F.R.E.E. | Illinois Humanities Council | Illinois Library Association | John Howard Association | National Lawyers Guild - St. Louis | Northwestern Child and Family Justice Center | NYC BTB | Pathway to Community | Precious Blood Ministry of Reconciliation | Read/Write Library | Real Cost of Prisons Project | Restore Justice Illinois | Rethinking Schools | Shriver Center | UIUC Campus Faculty Association | Unitarian Universalist Prison Ministry of Illinois | Uptown People's Law Center | YWCA of University of Illinois

Individuals

Wayne Au | Dee Battaglia | Liat Ben-Moshe | Bill Bigelow | Susan Burton | Brian Dolinar | Eve Ewing | Ruth Wilson Gilmore | Mariame Kaba | James Kilgore | Holly Krig | Terri Leclercq | Melissa Marturano | Reuben Miller | Beth Richie | Dave Roediger | Sarah Ross | Katy Ryan | Maya Schenwar | Heather Ann Thompson ...

complete list available [online](#)

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host a comparable program. In many other states, students in prison higher education programs have “transfer holds” placed on them so that they cannot be sent to another prison unless there is a clear and pressing need or they request the transfer. This should also be the policy in Illinois.

3. Freedom from Censorship.

Uncle Tom’s Cabin, *The Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass*, and the children’s book, *Visit to the Big House*, are some of the dozens of titles that have been banned by the Illinois Department of Corrections. None of these titles appear on the state’s official banned book list.

Book approval policies should be transparent and fair, with clear criteria and procedures, thus discouraging arbitrary and capricious acts of censorship. They should also include a timely and independent appeals process.

4. Freedom to Continue Education Upon Release.

Many incarcerated students wish to continue their education upon their release from prison and it is in the public interest that they do so. Illinois needs policies that support diploma and degree completion, such as:

- a) Requiring Illinois state colleges and universities to designate individuals in their Admissions Offices and Academic Advising Offices who will be trained to support and respond to the special needs of individuals with criminal records;
- b) Allowing formerly incarcerated students to maintain professional contact with the college-in-prison programs they studied with while in prison. Examples of professional contact include requesting letters of recommendation, attending skill-building workshops, and seeking assistance with applications.

CONTACT US

To become a supporter, share your story, or to learn more:

Website

freedom-to-learn.net

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We welcome media inquiries.

Books Banned by the Illinois Department of Corrections in the Past Year

The Souls of Black Folks

Public Housing Myths: Perception, Reality, and Social Policy

Black Power on Campus: University of Illinois 1965-75

Two Nations: Black and White, Separate, Hostile, Unequal

High Rise Stories: Voices from Chicago Public Housing

African-American Firsts: Little-Known and Unsung Triumphs of Blacks in America

Flash of the Spirit: African and Afro-American Art and Philosophy

The African Slave Trade

Up From Slavery

Privilege: The Making of an Adolescent Elite at St. Paul’s School

My Daddy Is in Jail

Help for Kids!: Understanding Your Feelings about Having a Parent in Prison or Jail

The Rise and Fall of Gay Culture

Contradictions of the Welfare State

Imperial Hygiene: A Critical History of Colonialism, Nationalism and Public Health

Contract Law and Theory

Earth Politics: Religion, Decolonization, and Bolivia’s Indigenous Intellectuals

The Last Hunger Season

Radical School Reform

[entire list available here](#)