

To: Allegheny County Jail Oversight Board

From: M. Gayle Moss

Re: Update – Book Subcommittee

The ACJ Book Review Committee met on May 8. The committee has standing agenda items that are discussed:

1. Curation of e-library and physical library
2. Book Orders Pending Review (if applicable)
3. Process improvement for reviewing book orders for policy compliance.
4. Process improvement for processing book orders.

The committee made the recommendation to update the website to include the following additional information under the frequently asked questions, and the update is currently pending:

“How can I notify the jail I sent books to an incarcerated individual there?”

Individuals who are sending books to an incarcerated individual at the ACJ can notify the jail of the order by emailing acjbookorders@alleghenycounty.us and attaching the receipt for the order. The subject line should include the following: Book Order: Full Name / DOC#

The ACJ e-library inventory is publicly available on the ACJ Library Services page ([Library Services | Jail | Allegheny County](#)). The inventory is updated monthly with new additions, but some book subscriptions may not be renewed due to low interest for titles that are purchased by access for a specific time period or number of checkouts within a time period. Those books are then removed from the e-library. The jail uses Overdrive and the Libby app – which are used by libraries across the country, including locally by the Carnegie Library system and the Allegheny County Library Association. E-library book title recommendations are submitted by various programs, include Chaplaincy, Re-Entry, Adult and Juvenile Education, Foundation of HOPE, and by members of the incarcerated population. Incarcerated individuals can submit requests through the tablet utilizing the “Book Requests” feature.

The jail took a physical book inventory in 2020. The ACJ recently constructed a new physical space for the library and increased the shelving capacity. The ACJ is looking at the best way to manage inventory and distribution. The physical library and e-library comprise the Library Services division that is managed as part of Jail Programs. This falls under the purview of the recently created position of Assistant Deputy Warden of Programs.

Book carts on housing units are rotated weekly and the carts on each housing level are rotated out with new carts every four-to-six weeks. New book carts can also be requested by the pod officer or by incarcerated individuals on the pod through the “Book Requests” feature on the tablets. Incarcerated individuals can also request specific genres of books to be added to the book cart through the “Book Requests” feature, and those books are added to the cart that is rotated onto the pod.

Books that are sent back for administrative reasons are returned to sender by the mailroom, which is staffed by the county’s Administrative Services department. When books are returned, the intended recipient is sent a notification on the tablet through facility messages with the book title(s) and the reason the books were returned. Examples of wording used:

We received a book order for you that came with no receipt. Per policy, a receipt must be received with shipment to process. We have held the order in hopes you could contact the sender to email in a receipt with full inventory of order to: ACJBookOrders@AlleghenyCounty.us. If you have any questions on this matter, please reach out via the “Book Requests” feature on the tablet.

We received a book order for you that came with no receipt. Per policy, a receipt must be received with shipment to process. We held the order for 10 days in hopes you could contact the sender to email in a receipt with full inventory. However, we did not receive a receipt, and the order has been returned to sender. If you have any questions on this matter, please reach out via the “Book Requests” feature on the tablet.

We received a book order for you that contained a paperback copy of (Book title) and hardcover copy of (Book title). Hardcover books are not authorized, and the order was returned to sender. Both titles have been added to the tablet e-library. If you have any questions on this matter, please reach out via “Book Requests” on the tablet.

The ACJ is looking to capitalize on the e-library platform and work with its vendor to make more of the information publicly available. Monthly summaries are posted to the website and include information such as total unique users and total holds of both e-books and audiobooks.

Month	Users	eBook Checkouts	eBook Holds*	Audiobook Checkouts	Audiobook Holds*
April	797	6849	411	647	70
May	852	8869	656	865	108

* Holds are placed by incarcerated individuals on eBooks or audiobooks that are checked out already. Individuals may keep an eBook or audiobook checked out for up to seven days.

The ACJ is working with the Department of Information technology to establish an effective and sustainable process to submit receipts that will also allow the sender to receive notifications when the book is received, processed, and delivered to the incarcerated individual. This new process would also allow for electronic submissions of appeals for any book returns that are not administrative in nature.