

# Books Behind Bars: What Does Library Access Look Like For Incarcerated Youth?

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## How Can We Find Out More?

### HISTORY

- Adult prisoners in the United States are legally encouraged to have law libraries. This was established in 1977 when the Supreme Court ruled that prisoners were entitled to a law library or legal assistance.
- However, in 1996, it was decided that this did not imply freestanding law libraries. This ruling negatively affected recreational prison libraries as well as law libraries.
- Incarcerated juveniles have no legal encouragement, legal entitlement or standardization on how, and if they get access to library services or information.

### WHY DO LIBRARIES MATTER FOR INCARCERATED YOUTH?

#### Literacy is important in the education of all youth:

- Reading is positively associated with empathy.
- Reading is positively associated with identity building in youth.
- Pleasure reading helps youth understand the world around them.

#### Access to information is power to incarcerated youth:

- Access to legal information can and should be provided through libraries.
- Access to sexual health information can and should be provided through libraries
- Downtime can be filled with recreational and informational readings as a form of "escape."

### AREAS OF CURRENT RESEARCH

#### Previous research is incomplete and falls in four categories:



**More compressive research needs to be done across the United States to fill in many gaps.**

### POINTS OF ACCESS

#### Incarcerated youth have three possible points of access to library resources:

##### School Libraries

- Incarcerated youth have the right to an education.
- Public School's serve Detention Centers to give youth access to schooling.
- Some school districts have librarians that serve detention centers.

##### Public Libraries

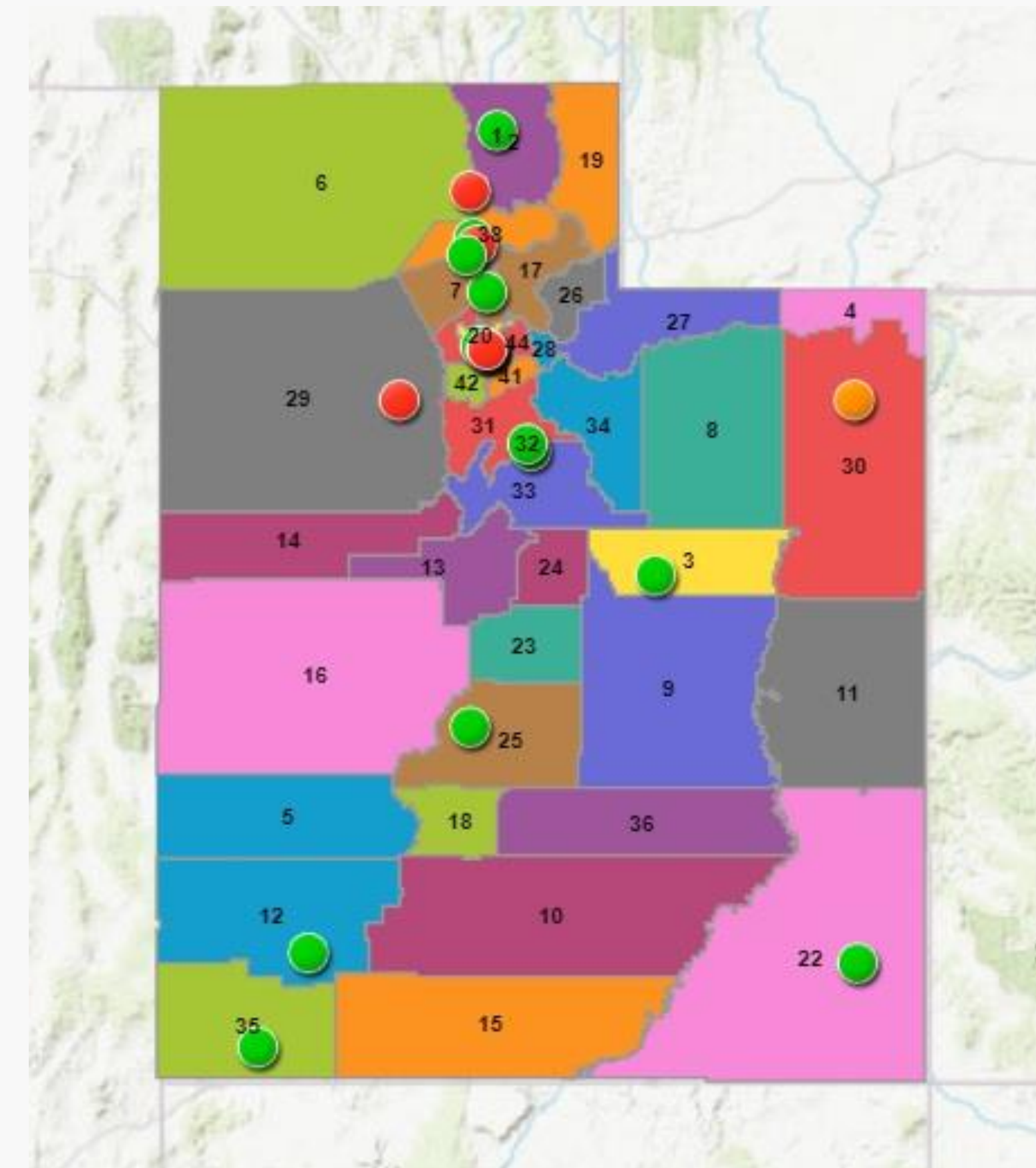
- Public Libraries in the area can provided resources for Detention Centers.
- Bookmobiles can provide access to rule areas or areas without a large public library.

##### Detention Centers

- Detention Centers often have small libraries made up of do of recreation books.

### PILOT STUDY IN THE STATE UTAH

All detention centers, counties, population areas school districts and library systems were mapped using the application ArcGIS.



- 4 out of 12 Detention Centers did not provide information.
- 4 out of 12 Public Libraries did not provide information.
- Attempts were made to contact School Districts, but there was no response from all 9 with a detention center in their areas.
- Utah Board of Education employees provided what information they knew about school districts involvement with Detention Centers.

### METHODS

- All Youth Detention Centers were called or emailed and asked about their library resources in their outside library access.
- Public Library Systems near Detention Centers we located and contacted to see what services were provided for Detention Centers.
- Contacting School districts with a Detention Center was attempted.
- Each was asked a series of questions involving:
  - Censorship
  - Library access for books, DVD's, CD, magazines, sexual health information, legal information
  - Quantity of materials
  - Suitability for teens
  - Internet access
  - Partnerships that proved library access and materials

### FINDINGS

#### Inconsistency

- There is no standard for if/where library martials and resources are provided.
- Many School Districts and Public Libraries do not communicate.
- Many centers in-house collection rely solely on donations.

#### Censorship

##### There are many types of censorship:

- "What is appropriate."
- "What is chosen by the English teacher."
- "Those other Vampire Books."
- "Anything that glorifies gang violence."
- "Things that would trigger trauma."

#### Information as a Privilege

- Library materials can be a part of a reward system in some centers.
- Few centers knew if their residents had access to independent sexual health or legal information.
- Few centers have any internet access for residents.

### GOING FORWARD

Each state should evaluate what their youth detention center library access looks like.

*When free people, through the judicial procedure, segregate some of their own, they incur the responsibility to provide humane treatment and essential rights. Among these is the right to read. The right to choose what to read is deeply important, and the suppression of ideas is fatal to a democratic society*

- ALA