

State Corrections Institution  
P. O. Box 244 AF8255  
Graterford PA 19426

29 May 1990

Honorable Stewart J. Greenleaf  
Member, Senate of Pennsylvania  
Senate Post Office  
Harrisburg PA 17120-0030

Dear Senator Greenleaf:

Thank you for your letter to Acting Commissioner Lehman and for sending me a copy of his response. I want to bring you up to date with a response to his concerns.

First, let me note that in the fourteen plus years I've been imprisoned my institution record is one of model conduct. For the rest of my life in prison I plan to abide by the general rules of conduct. I would not abuse Mr. Lehman's trust if he were to let me do this project. The equipment would be used under his rules. In fact, helping this school means enough to be even more observant of the rules.

I know electric typewriters are generally forbidden in the cells, that's why I'm asking for this relatively minor exception. The only difference between my typewriter and the approved ones is the use of household current (less than a one hundred-watt light bulb). (A three-month average of Graterford's electrical consumption last year was 1,182,600 kilowatts, about half their contracted limits. Recently many millions were spent upgrading our electrical distribution system. The minute increased load of one hundred additional watts can't cause any distress.)

It's no more a "...real security and safety risk" to allow these two items in one inmate's cell; there are electric typewriters and computers all over the prison, inmates use them every day under the same basic supervision I request.

We're talking about two or three easily searched pieces of mail a month. To further insure its integrity, the Chief Psychologist at Graterford would send the mail to and receive it from the Principal of Saint Lucy Day School.

Approving this community-service project that involves only one inmate may "...open the door to other similar requests". Such projects should be encouraged and carefully examined on their merits. In short, trampling mass participation in programs isn't the answer. Meaningful improvements within our prisons begins one small step at a time.

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The equipment I would use has been tested and approved for both fire and electrical safety by the Underwriters Labs.

Over the years the inconsistency of the reasons why I can't have a high-quality typewriter and the like clearly exposes the underlying motivation. It's driven by a fear that someone inside will alert the public to the dismal failings of our prisons and the product released from them. And I was foolish enough to expose some of the warts. Simply put, if there is a continuing strong desire to retaliate for my actions, then prison underlings will invent excuses. Perhaps you can convince Mr. Lehman such a stance is counterproductive to prison reform. I hope that Mr. Lehman would be willing to let me begin the Saint Lucy project, and that together we can work through his concerns.

Mr. Greenleaf, I understand the ramifications of the criminal act that earned me a sentence of life in prison. I understand society's revulsion against releasing those who kill. I expect to die in prison for this act. But I don't believe the rest of this life ought to be spent in systematized useless limbo. My talents should be freely given to those who are less fortunate than I. The braille for Saint Lucy's could be done without causing any harm to the normal institution routine.

I hope you would ask Mr. Lehman to reconsider the project; his concerns can be resolved, thus assuring the institution's continued safety and including the project.

Thanks again for your help in this matter.

Cordially yours,

Thomas Martin

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17 January 1992

The Honorable Michael P. McGeehan  
Attn: Kim Hatter  
7153 Torresdale Avenue  
Philadelphia PA 19135

Dear Kim Hatter:

Thank you for your interest in the work I am doing as a volunteer brailist while in prison. Please thank Representative McGeehan for his letter of 15 January to Commissioner Lehman on my behalf supporting this project.

It's really sad that a few prison officials would want to prevent me from sitting in a prison cell making braille, since there is such a great need for this service. Donald Vaughn, at Graterford, and one of his underlings, Alan LeFebvre, oppose anything that facilitates a flow of information from this prison, whether it be in the form of access to the courts, or of letters alerting the public to conditions within the prison. Their message has been conveyed to Mr. Lehman, couched in terms of "security matters". In their minds, typewriters, computers, and word-processors fall in this category, notwithstanding their use as personal educational tools, and their use if my Braille Project is to be anything more than a token undertaking.

There are several people who could talk to you about this project and their desire to expand its scope. Don Sundell, at the Technical Assistance for Sensory Impaired Program (800) 222-7372, would gladly send you information. Sister Mercedes McCann, Secretariat for Catholic Education, at (215) 587-3700, supports my efforts. Sister Judith Ann at the Saint Lucy Day School, (215) 352-4550, would attest to her needs and my ability to meet them. Mrs. May Davis of the Jenny Beck Braille Revival League (she works at Associated Services for the Blind) (215) 627-0600, would also let you know of my help to her group. I would be able to do a great deal more if I am permitted to sit in my cell evenings and weekends with the proper equipment doing braille transcription. By the way, I'm the only inmate in Pennsylvania's state prison system making braille.

I hope you might be able to help me convince the powers-that-be to let me do some of the braille work in the prison cell. The importance of using technology in meeting the heavy demand for braille transcription, and the opportunity to spend as much of my time as possible doing the work, is the only way I will be able to make this project a success.

Thank you for your consideration and cooperation.

Cordially yours,

Thomas Martin

To: Mr. Stachelek

25 January 1992

From: Thomas Martin AF8255

Dear Mr. Stachelek:

Don Sundell of TASIP sent me a letter telling me that one of the books he sent me to transcribe has been cancelled by the requesting school. This cancellation was caused solely because I have not been granted sufficient access to the braille gear to have the book finished on time.

As if this were not bad enough, Mrs. Davis (who Commissioner Lehman referred to you last year to let me help her group), sent three books months ago; they're also awaiting my brailleing. One of these books is job-related, belonging to a person who sent a letter - which Lance has - telling me she needs the book in order to do her job properly.

Last November Lance said that you were waiting for a change in the Commissary purchase list, so that I could then do some of the work in the cell. I've waited patiently; the folks who need this work done, and the other supporters want to know why I am not being allowed adequate time to do the work.

I'd also appreciate your help in clearing up something. Some of the outside people have contacted the institution concerning the project, and have somehow been given the impression that I am being afforded adequate time to do the work. This simply isn't so. These folks should be told that I have a full-time job in the Weave Plant, and the very most time I'm allowed for access to my braille project is less than 1½ hours a day, generally four days a week. During the bulk of my time I'm in the cell and am unable to pursue this endeavor.

You've found a solution for the many inmates who want to learn music: they are allowed to have their computerized-musical-keyboards and equipment in the cells, where they can practice for hours on end, supervised by the block Officers.

Mr. Stachelek, there is an urgent, pressing need for the work I am capable of doing. I know you are under pressure because of the many problems within the institution. I hope, however, that we can come to an agreement as to how we can adequately meet the needs of these deserving people, and permit me as much time in the cell to do braille work as possible.

Thank you

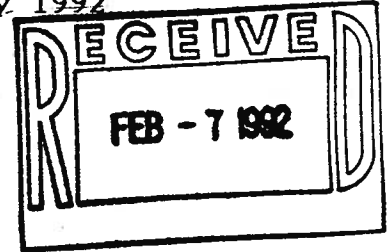
Thomas Martin

cc: Senators Greenleaf, Holl, Lynch  
Representatives McGeehan, Perzel, Richardson  
Mrs. Allen, Mrs. Davis, St. Lucy Day School, TASIP

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5 February 1992

The Honorable Thomas R. Caltagirone  
Attn: Mr. Davis L. Krantz  
House Post Office Box 209  
Harrisburg PA 17120-0028



Dear Mr. Krantz:

Thank you for the information concerning the private sector involvement in employing inmates while incarcerated. I have started a similar project, the major difference being I am willing to give my services freely to several organizations that need textbooks and other classroom materials transcribed into braille format.

With that thought in mind, enclosed is a copy of some correspondence generated in starting and trying to expand the program. In a nutshell, I would like to be able to use the braille equipment in the cell. I would then spend my evenings and weekends making braille for several organizations and schools. I've been trying since 1988 to convince the Warden at Graterford to permit me to have the equipment in the cell and do this volunteer work, to date to no avail.

This project would become a reality if the several prison officials could be convinced that the project requires no additional space; the taxpayers save money when I can provide this service; and that it meets the needs of the public. I hope you might be able to lend me a hand in making it possible.

Thank you for your consideration of this matter.

Cordially yours,

Thomas Martin