

Criminal Justice Issues and Prisoners' Rights

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CLEVELAND, OH Today, the ACLU of Ohio filed a lawsuit against the Ohio Department of Rehabilitation and Correction (ODRC) alleging that prison officials are restricting media access to prisoners convicted of crimes related to the 1993 Lucasville prison uprising in order to stifle public discussion about the event.

The job of the media is to explore important issues from all sides, said ACLU of Ohio Legal Director James Hardiman. When government officials arbitrarily stifle this process because they are uncomfortable with the conversation, they are preventing public discourse on critical issues, inhibiting a free press, and censoring prisoners from telling their stories to the media.

The ACLU complaint was filed on behalf of four reporters including Pulitzer-prize winner Chris Hedges and one teacher. Five Ohio prison inmates who wish to share their perspectives on the Lucasville uprising are also included as plaintiffs.

Prison officials have claimed that they deny these media requests because the inmates in question are at the highest prison security level, and thus ineligible for in-person interviews. However, they have repeatedly granted similar interview requests for other prisoners at the same security level including other death row inmates who were not involved in the Lucasville uprising.

Prison officials are not denying these interview requests based on security, said Hardiman. They are denying them based on what they think the inmates are going to say.

The Lucasville prison uprising dominated state and national news for weeks in 1993, and twenty years later, it is undeniably still a major area of interest for the press, added ACLU of Ohio Senior Staff Attorney Freda Levenson. Not only does the public have a right to know what is happening inside our prisons, the prisoners inside these facilities also have a right to share that information with the outside world.

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