

CHAPTER 3

YOUR RIGHT TO LEARN THE LAW AND GO TO COURT^{1*}

A. Introduction

Incarcerated people, just like non-incarcerated people, have a constitutional right to access the state and federal courts (called “right of access”).² However, the right of access for incarcerated people only requires that prison authorities provide incarcerated people with the tools they need to attack their sentences and challenge the conditions of their confinement.³ Attacking your sentence and challenging the conditions of your confinement means doing things like appealing your sentence, filing habeas petitions, and bringing claims that your basic constitutional rights are being violated while you are incarcerated.⁴ In other words, an incarcerated person has a right to legal assistance or resources, but not for every possible type of legal claim they might want to bring. Prisons will often meet this requirement by providing access to a law library, but they can also do so by providing some other form of legal assistance (for example, by providing access to legal professionals who can help you).

If the state stands in the way of your ability to do legal research or get legal assistance, you may be able to file a lawsuit claiming that you have been denied your right of access to the courts. However, the Supreme Court has made it difficult for an incarcerated person to win a right of access lawsuit. To win a right of access case, an incarcerated person must prove that they suffered an “actual injury” from the denial of the right to access.⁵ An incarcerated person cannot satisfy the “actual injury” requirement by arguing “that their prison’s law library or legal assistance program is subpar in some theoretical sense.”⁶ This means that you cannot just argue that your prison is failing to provide you with the legal resources that the Constitution requires. You must argue that the prison’s failure to provide you with those resources *actually* led to you losing an opportunity to raise a specific legal claim.⁷ For example, you could argue that you lost the opportunity to file your appeal because your prison denied you access to legal resources.⁸

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² See *Procunier v. Martinez*, 416 U.S. 396, 419, 94 S. Ct. 1800, 1814, 40 L. Ed. 2d 224, 243 (1974) (describing right of access to courts as part of constitutional due process of law requirements); *Bounds v. Smith*, 430 U.S. 817, 828, 97 S. Ct. 1491, 1498, 52 L. Ed. 2d 72, 83 (1977) (holding that the Constitution requires prison authorities to assist incarcerated people in exercising their fundamental right of access).

³ *Lewis v. Casey*, 518 U.S. 343, 355, 116 S. Ct. 2174, 2182, 35 L. Ed. 2d 606, 620 (1996) (holding that incarcerated people must be provided with the tools they “need in order to attack their sentences, directly or collaterally, and in order to challenge the conditions of their confinement”).

⁴ *Lewis v. Casey*, 518 U.S. 343, 354, 116 S. Ct. 2174, 2181–2182, 35 L. Ed. 2d 606, 620 (1996). For an explanation of appeals, see *JLM*, Chapter 9, “Appealing Your Conviction or sentence.” For an explanation of habeas corpus petitions, see *JLM*, Chapter 13, “Federal Habeas Corpus Petitions” and *JLM*, Chapter 21, “State Habeas Corpus: Florida, New York, and Michigan.” Civil rights actions involve the violation of your constitutional rights. For more information about your constitutional rights and how to sue those who violate your constitutional rights, see *JLM*, Chapter 16, “Using 42 U.S.C. § 1983 to Obtain Relief from Violations of Federal Law.”

⁵ *Lewis v. Casey*, 518 U.S. 343, 352–355, 116 S. Ct. 2174, 2180–2182, 35 L. Ed. 2d 606, 618–620 (1996).

⁶ *Lewis v. Casey*, 518 U.S. 343, 351, 116 S. Ct. 2174, 2180, 135 L. Ed. 2d 606, 618 (1996).

⁷ *Lewis v. Casey*, 518 U.S. 343, 351–353, 116 S. Ct. 2174, 2180–2181, 135 L. Ed. 2d 606, 617–619 (1996). *Lewis* was a class action case claiming denial of incarcerated people’ right of access to courts. The Supreme Court reversed a Ninth Circuit decision ordering Arizona to provide incarcerated people with extensively equipped law libraries and experienced library staff.

⁸ *Lewis v. Casey*, 518 U.S. 343, 350–351, 116 S. Ct. 2174, 2179–2180, 135 L. Ed. 2d 606, 617–618 (1996); see also *Christopher v. Harbury*, 536 U.S. 403, 413–415, 122 S. Ct. 2179, 2185–2186, 153 L. Ed. 2d 413 (2002) (distinguishing between forward-looking claims, where future adjustments can solve the problem, and backward-looking claims, where the opportunity was already lost. In both cases, the complaint must describe the legal opportunity that will be or was missed. In backward-looking claims, the complaint must identify a remedy that could not be awarded in some other suit that can still be brought.).

Congress has also made it difficult for incarcerated people to bring denial of access to court lawsuits. In 1995, Congress enacted the Prison Litigation Reform Act (“PLRA”). The PLRA requires incarcerated people to “exhaust” (use up) all of their prison’s administrative remedies before filing a civil rights lawsuit under 42 U.S.C. § 1983 in federal court. The information provided in this Chapter is to be used only as a *supplement* to the information provided in Chapter 14 of the *JLM*. **If you decide to pursue any claim in federal court, you need to read Chapter 14 of the *JLM* on the Prison Litigation Reform Act.** Failure to follow the requirements of the PLRA can lead to the loss of your good-time credit, the loss of your right to bring future claims in federal court without paying the full filing fee at the time you file your claim, and other negative consequences.⁹

This Chapter explains what is considered a violation of your right of access to the courts. Parts B and C explore the two threshold requirements that you must prove before the court will consider your case. There are two threshold requirements: (1) that you suffered an *actual* injury and (2) that you suffered that injury *because* the state failed to fulfill its duty to provide access to the courts. Part B explains the actual injury requirement. Part C outlines the extent of the state’s¹⁰ duty to provide you access to the courts. Parts D, E, and F explain your rights once these requirements have been met. Part D explains what adequate law libraries must contain. Part E explains what is considered adequate assistance from persons trained in the law (including the role of “jailhouse lawyers” in providing adequate assistance).¹¹ Part F explains the state’s duty to provide you with legal materials. The Appendix at the end of this Chapter provides a list of useful, publicly accessible online resources. Most of the websites provide access to searchable databases of recent trial and appellate decisions, in addition to Supreme Court cases. The Appendix highlights websites that combine various types of resources most effectively. Be aware, however, that some databases charge a fee to use their services.

Because the rights described in this Chapter relate to the conditions of your confinement, **the PLRA requires that you first try to protect your rights through your institution’s administrative grievance procedure.** Chapter 15 of the *JLM* provides more information on grievance procedures for incarcerated people. If you are unsuccessful or do not receive a favorable result through these procedures, you can then either bring a case under 42 U.S.C. § 1983, file a tort action in state court (or in the Court of Claims if you are in New York), or file an Article 78 petition in state court if you are in New York. More information on all of these types of cases can be found in Chapter 5, “Choosing a Court and a Lawsuit: An Overview of the Options;” Chapter 14, “The Prison Litigation Reform Act;” Chapter 16, “Using 42 U.S.C. § 1983 to Obtain Relief from Violations of Federal Law;” Chapter 17, “The State’s Duty to Protect You and Your Property: Tort Actions;” and Chapter 22, “How to Challenge Administrative Decisions Using Article 78 of the New York Civil Practice Law and Rules,” of the *JLM*.

⁹ 28 U.S.C. § 1915(g).

¹⁰ The word “state,” as used in this Chapter, means either a state government or the federal government. In other words, if you are a federally incarcerated person, the word “state” in this Chapter means the federal government.

¹¹ A jailhouse lawyer is defined as an incarcerated person “who seeks release through legal procedures or who gives legal advice to other inmates.” *Jailhouse Lawyer*, BLACK’S LAW DICTIONARY (11th ed. 2019).

B. Fulfilling the Actual Injury Requirement

The Supreme Court requires that you show an “actual injury” from the alleged violation in order to show that your right to access the courts has been violated.¹² This requirement makes it harder for incarcerated people to succeed in their right to access cases. Establishing that the prison’s law library or legal assistance program is inadequate is not enough to prove actual injury. You must show that you were kept from pursuing a non-frivolous claim because of these deficiencies.¹³ A “non-frivolous claim” is a claim that is “at least arguable” based on the facts and the law.¹⁴

One way to prove an actual injury is to show that a complaint you prepared was dismissed for failure to meet a “technical requirement” that you could not have known about because of insufficient access to legal resources at your prison facility.¹⁵ In this context, “technical requirement” could refer to a court’s procedural or document-related rule that, if broken, might lead the court to dismiss a claim. Another possibility is to show you were prevented from filing a claim in the first place because of inadequacies in the legal facilities of the prison.¹⁶ If you and others bring a class action, you must show that the injury was systemic, which means you must show a system-wide problem.¹⁷

C. How the State’s Limited Duty to Provide Access to the Courts May Apply to You

There are a few things to keep in mind when developing your claim:

- (1) The state’s duty to provide you with adequate law libraries or adequate assistance by persons trained in law may not extend to the type of legal action you want to bring;
- (2) Your correctional facility can choose how it will meet its duty to provide legal information or expertise;
- (3) The state’s duty almost always applies, regardless of what kind of facility you are incarcerated in;
- (4) It is currently unclear how far the state’s duty to provide access extends; and
- (5) The state’s duty applies whether or not you are considered indigent (meaning whether or not you can afford to sue).¹⁸

¹² *Lewis v. Casey*, 518 U.S. 343, 351, 116 S. Ct. 2174, 2180, 135 L. Ed. 2d 606, 617–618 (1996); *see also* *Chriceol v. Phillips*, 169 F.3d 313, 317 (5th Cir. 1999) (finding that denial of access to funds from prison accounts to pay for filing fees did not constitute an actual injury because the complaint had been successfully filed); *Tourscher v. McCullough*, 184 F.3d 236, 242 (3d Cir. 1999) (finding that defendant failed to allege facts demonstrating that the number of hours he was required to work frustrated his access to the courts); *Klinger v. Dept. of Corr.*, 107 F.3d 609, 617 (8th Cir. 1997) (showing a complete and systematic denial of access to the law library or legal assistance was not enough to demonstrate actual injury); *Oliver v. Fauver*, 118 F.3d 175, 178 (3d Cir. 1997) (granting summary judgment for state corrections officers because the incarcerated person suffered no injury as a result of alleged interference with legal mail); *Pilgrim v. Littlefield*, 92 F.3d 413, 416 (6th Cir. 1996) (holding that *pro se* incarcerated people failed to demonstrate that inadequacy of the prison law library or legal assistance caused actual injury); *Sabers v. Delano*, 100 F.3d 82, 84 (8th Cir. 1996) (finding that incarcerated person had to show actual injury due to denial of access to courts, even if denial was systemic; specifically, incarcerated person had the burden of showing that the “lack of a library or the attorney’s inadequacies hindered [her] efforts to proceed with [the] legal claim in a criminal appeal, post-conviction matter, or civil rights action”); *Stotts v. Salas*, 938 F. Supp. 663, 667–668 (D. Haw. 1996) (holding that a state incarcerated person transferred to another state must show actual injury to have law books sent from the state of his former prison); *Cody v. Weber*, 256 F.3d 764, 769–770, (8th Cir. 2001) (holding that there was no “actual injury” when the incarcerated person was not allowed to access his computer, which stored his legal data, because no specific injury was demonstrated; rather, the incarcerated person vaguely claimed that the data would set him free); *Hartmann v. O’Connor*, 415 F. App’x 350, 352 (3rd Cir. 2011) (*unpublished*) (holding that there was no “actual injury” when the incarcerated person was allegedly denied access to the internet because the incarcerated person eventually made his legal claims in court).

¹³ *Lewis v. Casey*, 518 U.S. 343, 351, 116 S. Ct. 2174, 2180, 135 L. Ed. 2d 606, 618 (1996) (concluding that the incarcerated person must show that “the alleged shortcomings in the library or legal assistance program hindered his efforts to pursue a legal claim”).

¹⁴ *Lewis v. Casey*, 518 U.S. 343, 399, 116 S. Ct. 2174, 2203, 135 L. Ed. 2d 606, 662 (1996).

¹⁵ *Lewis v. Casey*, 518 U.S. 343, 351, 116 S. Ct. 2174, 2180, 135 L. Ed. 2d 606, 618 (1996).

¹⁶ *Lewis v. Casey*, 518 U.S. 343, 351, 116 S. Ct. 2174, 2180, 135 L. Ed. 2d 606, 618 (1996) (arguing that an incarcerated person could prove actual injury if the “inadequacies of the law library” prevented him from even filing a complaint).

¹⁷ *See, e.g., Lewis v. Casey*, 518 U.S. 343, 349, 116 S. Ct. 2174, 2179, 135 L. Ed. 2d 606, 616 (1996) (holding that “isolated instances of actual injury” are not enough to show a systemic *Bounds* violation).

¹⁸ *Bounds v. Smith*, 430 U.S. 817, 828, 97 S. Ct. 1491, 1498, 52 L. Ed. 2d 72, 83 (1977) (holding that federal habeas

First, your right of access to the courts does not extend to every type of legal action you might want to bring. In *Lewis v. Casey*, the Supreme Court said that your right of access is limited to non-frivolous legal actions that either attack your prison sentence or challenge the conditions of your confinement.¹⁹ Specifically, *Lewis* provided three examples of legal actions that *can* support a right of access claim: direct appeals, habeas corpus proceedings, and 42 U.S.C. § 1983 civil rights suits that allege your prison conditions are violating your basic constitutional rights.²⁰ Even today, almost three decades after the decision, courts still tend to follow the very narrow limits set by *Lewis*.²¹ So, a court probably will not grant your right of access claim unless you are arguing that the prison interfered with your ability to file an appeal, a habeas petition, a civil suit arguing that your prison conditions violate your rights, or a type of legal action that is very similar to any of these.

Second, the state may choose how to fulfill its duty to provide incarcerated people access to legal information and expertise.²² The state may provide you with an adequate law library, adequate assistance from persons trained in the law, a combination of the two, or something slightly different.²³ For example, an inadequate or non-existent law library may not violate an incarcerated person's right of access when the

corpus or state or federal civil rights actions are encompassed within the right of access to the courts); *see also* *Knop v. Johnson*, 977 F.2d 996, 1009 (6th Cir. 1992) (determining that requiring a state to provide affirmative legal assistance to incarcerated people in actions unrelated to constitutional rights or their incarceration would be “an unwarranted extension of the right of access”); *John L. v. Adams*, 969 F.2d 228, 235–236 (6th Cir. 1992) (holding that states do *not* have a duty to provide affirmative assistance to incarcerated people on civil matters arising under state law, but noting that “states are required to provide affirmative assistance in the preparation of legal papers in cases involving constitutional rights and other civil rights actions related to their incarceration . . . [and also that] in all other types of civil actions states may not erect barriers that impede the right of access of incarcerated people”); *Walters v. Edgar*, 900 F. Supp. 197, 229 (N.D. Ill. 1995) (finding that incarcerated people have no constitutional right to assistance from the state to pursue child custody matters); *cf. Glover v. Johnson*, 75 F.3d 264, 269 (6th Cir. 1996) (finding that female incarcerated people are *not* entitled to legal assistance in child custody matters beyond those related to “habeas corpus, and civil rights matters involving the prisoner’s custodial situation or constitutional claims personally involving the prisoner”).

¹⁹ *Lewis v. Casey*, 518 U.S. 343, 355, 116 S. Ct. 2174, 2182, 135 L. Ed. 2d 606, 620 (1996).

²⁰ *Lewis v. Casey*, 518 U.S. 343, 354, 116 S. Ct. 2174, 2181–2182, 135 L. Ed. 2d 606, 620 (1996).

²¹ *See, e.g., Steele v. United States Postal Serv.*, 2024 U.S. App. LEXIS 1324, *3 (5th Cir. 2024) (denying a right of access claim arguing that the prison’s refusal to allow incarcerated people to use mail services other than USPS because the petitioner did not argue USPS’s mail delays impacted his ability to challenge his sentence or conditions of confinement); *Nelson v. Dreher*, 2023 U.S. App. LEXIS 13353, *3 (3rd Cir. 2023) (a prison withholding legal mail that included orders dismissing an incarcerated person’s civil claims without prejudice did not harm his ability to challenge his sentence or conditions of confinement so was not a right of access violation); *Houbbadi v. Montgomery Cnty.*, 2023 U.S. App. LEXIS 10655, *5 (6th Cir. 2023) (denying an incarcerated person’s right of access claim because the underlying legal claims he was unable to pursue were for a breach of contract and fraud, which did not challenge a sentence or conditions of confinement); *Murdock v. Thompson*, 2022 U.S. App. LEXIS 33198, *11 (4th Cir. 2022) (denying an incarcerated person’s right of access claim because he failed to specifically identify the claim he was unable to bring and that it related to challenging his sentence or conditions of confinement).

²² *Morello v. James*, 810 F.2d 344, 346–347 (2d Cir. 1987) (“The right of access to the courts is substantive rather than procedural. Its exercise can be shaped and guided by the state but cannot be obstructed, regardless of the procedural means applied.” (citation omitted)); *Ramos v. Lamm*, 639 F.2d 559, 583 (10th Cir. 1980) (“*Bounds* does not hold that inmates have an absolute right to any particular type of legal assistance. The states are still free to choose among a variety of methods or combinations thereof in meeting their constitutional obligations [to provide access to the courts].” (citation omitted)); *Glover v. Johnson*, 75 F.3d 264, 266–267 (6th Cir. 1996) (holding that state could terminate funding for prison legal services program that provided female incarcerated people with assistance on child care matters because the termination did not violate the right of access to courts).

²³ The Supreme Court has pointed out that “while adequate law libraries are one constitutionally acceptable method to assure meaningful access to the courts,” alternative programs may be acceptable. *Bounds v. Smith*, 430 U.S. 817, 830, 97 S. Ct. 1491, 1499, 52 L. Ed. 2d 72, 84 (1977). The *Bounds* Court suggested some alternatives to having a law library:

Among the alternatives are the training of inmates as paralegal assistants to work under lawyers’ supervision, the use of paraprofessionals and law students . . . , the organization of volunteer attorneys through bar associations or other groups, the hiring of lawyers on a parttime consultant basis, and the use of full-time staff attorneys, working either in new prison legal assistance organizations or as part of public defender or legal services offices.

Bounds v. Smith, 430 U.S. 817, 831, 97 S. Ct. 1491, 1499–1500, 52 L. Ed. 2d 72, 84–85 (1977). The *Bounds* Court did not consider this list of proposed alternatives complete, stating that “a legal access program need not include any particular element we have discussed, and we encourage local experimentation.” *Bounds v. Smith*, 430 U.S. 817, 832, 97 S. Ct. 1491, 1500, 52 L. Ed. 2d 72, 85 (1977).

state provides some other sort of legal assistance.²⁴ At the same time, while the state is free to devise its own legal access plan, there is no guarantee that courts will find that plan sufficient to satisfy your right of access to the courts.²⁵

Third, the state's duty to provide incarcerated people with access to the courts is not limited to those in state prison. The right of access also extends to incarcerated people in county and city jails,²⁶ incarcerated juveniles, persons serving brief sentences in local jails, pretrial detainees, and mental patients under commitment.²⁷ Incarcerated people who are transferred from one state correctional facility to another or from a state correctional facility to a federal correctional facility retain their right of access to the courts and, therefore, must be provided some legal access program.²⁸ For example, a federal court in New York State has suggested that a state might fulfill its obligation to provide access to the courts by either supplying law books or providing legal counsel to state-incarcerated people in federal facilities.²⁹ However, as in *Blake v. Berman*, the court may find that the state has fulfilled its duty by providing you with persons trained in the law, although the state did not provide any legal materials pertaining to the state in which you were convicted.³⁰

Fourth, the extent of a state's duty to help you access the courts is unclear. For example, is it enough for a state to assist you only until you are finished writing your complaint? In *Lewis*, the Supreme Court said that prison authorities have no duty to assist the incarcerated person in finding or recognizing violations of his rights or to "litigate effectively once in court."³¹

Finally, the right of access to the courts applies to all incarcerated people regardless of their financial status.

²⁴ Prison authorities may "replace libraries with some minimal access to legal advice and a system of court-provided forms . . . that asked the inmates to provide only the facts and not to attempt any legal analysis." *Lewis v. Casey*, 518 U.S. 343, 352, 116 S. Ct. 2174, 2180, 135 L. Ed. 2d 606, 618–619 (1996); *see also* *Blake v. Berman*, 877 F.2d 145, 146 (1st Cir. 1989) (finding that a law school clinical program might be considered an adequate alternative to a law library).

²⁵ *See* *Novak v. Beto*, 453 F.2d 661, 663–664 (5th Cir. 1971) (finding that a prison's efforts to provide "alternatives to inmate assistance"—which included granting access to a small "library," where incarcerated people could use each other's law books as well as those maintained by the State, hiring 2 full-time attorneys, and temporarily hiring 3 senior law students during the summer—may not be sufficient as an alternative to allowing incarcerated people to provide some form of legal assistance to one another), *cert. denied sub nom.* *Sellars v. Beto*, 409 U.S. 968, 93 S. Ct. 279, 34 L. Ed. 2d 233 (1972).

²⁶ *See* *Leeds v. Watson*, 630 F.2d 674, 676–677 (9th Cir. 1980) (finding that there is a question of obstruction when incarcerated people in a county jail are required to get a court order to have access to a law library close by, and must be accompanied by a guard, and are not given sufficient information concerning these requirements); *Williams v. Leeke*, 584 F.2d 1336, 1340 (4th Cir. 1978) (finding that a situation where an incarcerated person in a city jail was only allowed to access legal resources 3 days a week for 45 minutes each day was "on its face a constitutional violation"); *Cruz v. Hauck*, 475 F.2d 475, 476–477 (5th Cir. 1973) (holding that prison regulations must not unreasonably invade the relationship of the incarcerated person to the courts in a case where the incarcerated person was in a county jail); *Tuggle v. Barksdale*, 641 F. Supp. 34, 36–37 (W.D. Tenn. 1985) (discussing how the fundamental right of access to the court may be applied in a county jail).

²⁷ *John L. v. Adams*, 969 F.2d 228, 233 (6th Cir. 1992) (holding that incarcerated juveniles have a constitutional right of access to the courts).

²⁸ *Messere v. Fair*, 752 F. Supp. 48, 50 (D. Mass. 1990) (holding that the Department of Corrections failed to provide the incarcerated person, who was transferred to a Connecticut prison from Massachusetts, with "meaningful access to the Massachusetts courts within the contemplation of *Bounds v. Smith*," because the Connecticut library's copying service required specific citations for incarcerated people to access Massachusetts legal materials, Connecticut's legal assistance program refused to work on matters involving Massachusetts law, and Massachusetts's legal services program did not provide assistance to people incarcerated out of state).

²⁹ *See* *Kivela v. U.S. Att'y Gen.*, 523 F. Supp. 1321, 1325 (S.D.N.Y. 1981) (holding that incarcerated people's right of access to courts is satisfied when state has provided either law books or legal counsel), *aff'd*, 688 F.2d 815 (2d Cir. 1982).

³⁰ *Blake v. Berman*, 877 F.2d 145, 146 (1st Cir. 1989) (finding that a prison program providing legal assistance instead of a full law library satisfied access requirements).

³¹ *Lewis v. Casey*, 518 U.S. 343, 354, 116 S. Ct. 2174, 2181, 135 L. Ed. 2d 606, 619–620 (1996) (denying that "the State must enable the incarcerated person to discover grievances" (emphasis omitted)). The *Lewis* Court limited the *Bounds* ruling to only require states to provide tools "that the inmates need in order to attack their sentences, directly or collaterally, and in order to challenge the conditions of their confinement. Impairment of any other litigating capacity is simply one of the incidental (and perfectly constitutional) consequences of conviction and incarceration." *Lewis v. Casey*, 518 U.S. 343, 355, 116 S. Ct. 2174, 2182, 135 L. Ed. 2d 606, 620 (1996).

D. What is an Adequate Law Library?

The Supreme Court has never defined exactly what it means when it says “adequate” law library.³² The American Association of Law Libraries (“AALL”) Special Committee on Law Library Services to Prisoners has a suggested list of resources that should be in a prison law library. However, states are not required to follow the AALL’s guidelines. Additionally, various lower courts have come up with their own list of what a prison law library should contain.³³ Even if a prison has a law library that meets either a court’s requirements or the AALL’s guidelines, a court may still decide that access to the court has been denied if books are frequently missing or if incarcerated people cannot use the library.³⁴ For example, functionally illiterate people,³⁵ non-English speakers,³⁶ and the blind cannot use typical law libraries.³⁷ When incarcerated people cannot use the law library because of illiteracy, an inability to speak English, or a disability, the state may need to provide them with a legal assistance program. This legal assistance program will be provided by persons trained in the law in addition to, or in place of, an adequate prison law library.³⁸

³² The Court simply stated that incarcerated people’s access to the courts should be “adequate, effective, and meaningful” and that “[m]eaningful access’ to the courts is the touchstone.” *Bounds v. Smith*, 430 U.S. 817, 822–823, 97 S. Ct. 1491, 1495, 52 L. Ed. 2d 72, 79–80 (1977) (quoting *Ross v. Moffitt*, 417 U.S. 600, 611, 612, 615, 94 S. Ct. 2437, 2444–2446, 41 L. Ed. 2d 341, 351, 353 (1974)).

³³ In *Lindquist v. Idaho State Bd. of Corr.*, 776 F.2d 851, 856 (9th Cir. 1985), the Ninth Circuit held that the following list of books “meets minimum constitutional standards and provides inmates with sufficient access to legal research materials to prepare *pro se* pleadings, appeals, and other legal documents” for Idaho State: Idaho Code; Idaho Reports; United States Reports from 1962 to present; Federal Reporter Second Series, beginning with volume 273 [1960]; portions of the United States Code Annotated, including the Federal Rules of Appellate Procedure and Federal Rules of Evidence; Appellate Rules of the Ninth Circuit Court of Appeals; Local Rules of the United States District Court for the District of Idaho; various Nutshells on procedure, civil rights, criminal law, constitutional law, and legal research; West Pacific Digest Second Series; various volumes of Federal Practice & Procedure; Manual for Complex Litigation Pamphlet Subscription; Federal Practice & Procedure, Criminal Pamphlet; West Federal Practice Digest, 2nd edition; Pacific Digest Second Series; Federal Supplement, beginning with volume 482 [1980]. In *Tuggle v. Barksdale*, 641 F. Supp. 34, 39 (W.D. Tenn. 1985), the court stated that the law library in this case should include the following: “[all] volumes and titles of U.S.C.A . . . which cover the United States Constitution, and Titles 5, 15, [and] 18 [of the U.S.C.A.] with complete rules of the various courts, [Title] 28 with complete rules, [Title] 42 and the General Index . . . Federal Practice and Procedure by Wright and Miller, . . . Tennessee Code Annotated Volume 7 and 10 and Criminal Law Library (2-volume set, latest edition)[,] . . . [and] Black’s Law Dictionary latest edition.” Also, see *Griffin v. Coughlin*, 743 F. Supp. 1006, 1020–1025 (N.D.N.Y. 1990), in which the court examined the inventory of the Clinton Main law library in detail and stated that it was constitutionally sufficient insofar as it provided incarcerated people with “access to a law book inventory which rises above the constitutional minimum.”

³⁴ *Walters v. Edgar*, 900 F. Supp. 197, 226–227 (N.D. Ill. 1995) (finding that prison’s replacement of missing volumes only once a year appeared to be inadequate maintenance of library, and holding that even if incarcerated people might be responsible for stealing the missing volumes, “each plaintiff’s right of access to the courts is individual, and therefore . . . [an incarcerated person] cannot be prevented access by . . . theft”). See, e.g., *Cruz v. Hauck*, 627 F.2d 710, 721 30 Fed. R. Serv. 2d 494 (5th Cir. 1980) (“Library books, even if ‘adequate’ in number, cannot provide access to the courts for those persons who do not speak English or who are illiterate.”); see also *Acevedo v. Forcinito*, 820 F. Supp. 886, 888 (D.N.J. 1993) (“[F]or prisoners who cannot read or understand English, the constitutional right of access to the courts cannot be determined solely by the number of volumes in, or size of a law library.”).

³⁵ A functionally illiterate person is someone who has reading and writing skills that are inadequate to help him with tasks beyond a basic skill level. See, e.g., *Lindquist v. Idaho State Bd. of Corr.*, 776 F.2d 851, 855–856 (9th Cir. 1985) (stating that “[a] book and a library are of no use, in and of themselves, to a prisoner who cannot read”); *U.S. ex rel. Para-Prof. Law Clinic v. Kane*, 656 F. Supp. 1099, 1105–1107 (E.D. Pa. 1987) (holding, in part, that the elimination of a jailhouse lawyer association, leaving only a law library for incarcerated people, would leave functionally illiterate incarcerated people without court access), *aff’d*, 835 F.2d 285 (3d Cir. 1987).

³⁶ See, e.g., *United States ex rel. Para-Prof. Law Clinic v. Kane*, 656 F. Supp. 1099, 1106 (E.D. Pa. 1987) (stating that “Spanish-speaking inmates who cannot read or write English are unable to present, with reasonable adequacy, complaints to the courts without assistance”).

³⁷ *Phillips v. United States*, 836 F. Supp. 965, 967–968 (N.D.N.Y. 1993) (accepting that an incarcerated person’s blindness may effectively deny him access to the prison law library).

³⁸ *Phillips v. United States*, 836 F. Supp. 965, 967–968 (N.D.N.Y. 1993) (stating that in some circumstances denial of access to a legal assistance program may give rise to a claim of denial of access to the court).

Generally, the state may limit your access to law libraries and legal materials for security reasons.³⁹ As long as these restrictive practices are justified by security reasons, they are upheld in courts, even if the restrictions make court access more difficult for incarcerated people.⁴⁰ For example, prison officials can limit the amount of time an individual incarcerated person may spend in the library⁴¹ or the amount of time the library is open “in light of legitimate security considerations.”⁴² However, the state cannot limit your access to law libraries or legal assistance to the point that it functionally blocks access to the courts.⁴³

Prison regulations can also affect segregated incarcerated people’s access to law libraries, legal materials, and legal assistance. Courts have stopped states from enforcing regulations that restrict or withhold law books from incarcerated people in solitary confinement.⁴⁴ Several (but not all) courts have criticized “paging systems,” where incarcerated people are given access only to legal books they specifically request.⁴⁵ Other request requirements for library access have also been criticized.⁴⁶ However, a prison can meet its obligation to provide a segregated incarcerated person with access to the courts by allowing some (but limited) access to legal materials or some access to legal assistance.⁴⁷

E. The State’s Duty to Permit Access to Adequate Legal Assistance

The Supreme Court in *Bounds* did not define what “adequate” means in the context of adequate assistance from persons trained in the law. However, courts have occasionally described what might

³⁹ *Lindquist v. Idaho State Bd. of Corr.*, 776 F.2d 851, 858 (9th Cir. 1985) (stating that “[p]rison officials of necessity must regulate the time, manner, and place in which library facilities are used” (citing *Twyman v. Crips*, 584 F.2d 352, 358 (10th Cir. 1978))).

⁴⁰ *Lewis v. Casey*, 518 U.S. 343, 361–362, 116 S. Ct. 2174, 2185, 135 L. Ed. 2d 606, 624 (1996) (holding that “delays in receiving legal materials or legal assistance” are “not of constitutional significance, even where they result in actual injury” as long as they come from “prison regulations reasonably related to legitimate penological interests”).

⁴¹ *Shango v. Jurich*, 965 F.2d 289, 292–293 (7th Cir. 1992) (holding that restrictions on library hours which included: being closed nights, weekends, and holidays; allowing “general population” incarcerated people to use the library, optimally for 10–11 hours, one day each week; and limiting the library visitation hours for people in segregation and protective custody to about 3 hours every third to fifth weekday, did not deny incarcerated people the constitutional right of meaningful access as described in *Bounds* [*v. Smith*, 430 U.S. 817, 828, 97 S. Ct. 1491, 1498, 52 L. Ed. 2d 72 (1977)]); see also *Lindquist v. Idaho State Bd. of Corr.*, 776 F.2d 851, 858 (9th Cir. 1985) (stating that library being open a minimum of 11 hours each day was “an adequate amount of total library access time”).

⁴² *Shango v. Jurich*, 965 F.2d 289, 292 (7th Cir. 1992) (quoting *Caldwell v. Miller*, 790 F.2d 589, 606 (7th Cir. 1986)).

⁴³ See *Straub v. Monge*, 815 F.2d 1467, 1469 (11th Cir. 1987) (“Regulations and practices that unjustifiably obstruct the availability of professional representation or other aspects of the right of access to the courts are invalid.” (quoting *Procunier v. Martinez*, 416 U.S. 396, 419, 94 S. Ct. 1800, 1814, 40 L. Ed. 2d 224 (1974))).

⁴⁴ See, e.g., *Knell v. Bensinger*, 489 F.2d 1014, 1016–1017 (7th Cir. 1973) (holding that, although an incarcerated person in isolation does not have unlimited rights to use the library, if an incarcerated person in solitary confinement is prevented from using the library or consulting an advisor to prepare a petition, the courts may find that the incarcerated person’s right of access was effectively denied); *United States ex rel. Para-Prof. Law Clinic v. Kane*, 656 F. Supp. 1099, 1104–1105 (E.D. Pa. 1987) (finding prison’s program of providing a small number of cases or books to segregated incarcerated people was unconstitutional, and prison had a “duty to insure that the ‘opportunity to do legal research [given to segregated incarcerated people] must be at least the equivalent of the opportunity that is available to an inmate who is permitted to go personally to the prison law library’” (quoting *Wojtczak v. Cuyler*, 480 F. Supp. 1288, 1301 (E.D. Pa. 1979))); *Johnson v. Anderson*, 370 F. Supp. 1373, 1383–1385 (D. Del. 1974) (holding prison rules allowing an incarcerated person in solitary confinement access to only one law book of his choosing on two times during the week violated the incarcerated person’s due process right), *modified on other grounds*, 420 F. Supp. 845 (D. Del. 1976).

⁴⁵ The runner system or paging system, “also known as an ‘exact-cite system’ because an inmate must request materials by exact cite,” has been deemed an inadequate legal access system for both segregated and non-segregated incarcerated people by some courts. *E.g.*, *Canell v. Bradshaw*, 840 F. Supp. 1382, 1389 (D. Or. 1993) (holding paging system alone does not provide adequate access to the courts), *aff’d*, 97 F.3d 1458 (9th Cir. 1996); *Griffin v. Coughlin*, 743 F. Supp. 1006, 1023 (N.D.N.Y. 1990) (finding prison’s book request system deprived incarcerated people in protective custody of meaningful access to the courts).

⁴⁶ See, e.g., *Cepulonis v. Fair*, 732 F.2d 1, 4 (1st Cir. 1984) (finding requirement that incarcerated people identify specific volumes sought prior to entering library to be suspect); *Williams v. Leeke*, 584 F.2d 1336, 1339 (4th Cir. 1978) (“It is unrealistic to expect a prisoner to know in advance exactly what materials he needs to consult.”).

⁴⁷ See, e.g., *Lovell v. Brennan*, 566 F. Supp. 672, 696–697 (D. Me. 1983) (stating that an adequate legal access plan would provide segregated incarcerated people with access to law books and an advocate, or other persons trained in the law, depending on the circumstances), *aff’d*, 728 F.2d 560 (1st Cir. 1984).

qualify as adequate.⁴⁸ For example, if the state only provides people who are *not* trained in the law to assist you, such assistance might not satisfy your right of access to the courts.⁴⁹

Legal assistance from persons trained in the law does not mean the same thing as assistance from a lawyer. Sometimes, the state may decide to fulfill its obligation to provide you with access to courts by allowing other incarcerated people to assist you.⁵⁰ Incarcerated people who provide other incarcerated people with legal assistance are called jailhouse lawyers or “writ writers.”⁵¹ In *Johnson v. Avery*, the Supreme Court held that a state could not prevent one incarcerated person from assisting another incarcerated person in preparing his writ when there were no reasonable alternatives to such assistance.⁵² Therefore, if the state does not provide you with any sort of adequate legal access program, it cannot prohibit you from getting assistance from a jailhouse lawyer.⁵³ Although the state may not be able to prohibit you from getting assistance from a jailhouse lawyer, the state can still reasonably regulate the activities of jailhouse lawyers.⁵⁴ For example, the state can require that a jailhouse lawyer get approval from the state before helping another incarcerated person.⁵⁵ The state can also prohibit jailhouse lawyers from visiting the cells of the incarcerated people they are assisting⁵⁶ and from being paid for their services.⁵⁷

F. The State's Duty to Provide Materials

The right of access to the courts requires more than just being provided with a library and research tools. The Supreme Court has held that the right of access to the courts also includes providing

⁴⁸ In *Gluth v. Kangas*, the Ninth Circuit upheld the district court's imposition of a training program for incarcerated person legal assistants. The *Gluth* court stated that “*Bounds* requires, in the absence of adequate law libraries, ‘some degree of professional or quasi-professional legal assistance to prisoners.’ Although legal training need not be extensive, *Bounds* does require that inmates be provided the legal assistance of persons with at least some training in the law.” *Gluth v. Kangas*, 951 F.2d 1504, 1511–1512 (9th Cir. 1991) (citations omitted); see also *Darby v. Schmalenberger*, 2012 U.S. Dist. LEXIS 160858, at *19–20 (D.N.D. May 7, 2012) (*unpublished*) (holding that an incarcerated person has “neither a right to internet access nor a right to file electronically” because the State has a “legitimate penological interest in restricting inmates’ internet access”).

⁴⁹ *Valentine v. Beyer*, 850 F.2d 951, 956 (3d Cir. 1988) (“An untrained legal research staff is insufficient to safeguard an inmate’s right of access to the courts.” (citing *United States ex rel. Para-Professional Law Clinic v. Kane*, 656 F. Supp. 1099, 1104 (E.D. Pa. 1987), *cert. denied*, 485 U.S. 993, 108 S. Ct. 1302, 99 L. Ed. 2d 511 (1988))).

⁵⁰ This has also been called “mutual assistance among inmates.” *Johnson v. Avery*, 393 U.S. 483, 490, 89 S. Ct. 747, 751, 21 L. Ed. 2d 718, 724 (1969).

⁵¹ See *Johnson v. Avery*, 393 U.S. 483, 487–488, 89 S. Ct. 747, 750–751, 21 L. Ed. 2d 718, 722–723 (1969) (discussing role of incarcerated people who provide legal assistance to other incarcerated people).

⁵² *Johnson v. Avery*, 393 U.S. 483, 490, 89 S. Ct. 747, 750–751, 21 L. Ed. 2d 718, 723–724 (1969) (striking down a prison regulation prohibiting incarcerated people from providing each other with any sort of legal help or advice).

⁵³ *Johnson v. Avery*, 393 U.S. 483, 490, 89 S. Ct. 747, 751, 21 L. Ed. 2d 718, 724 (1969) (“[U]nless and until the State provides some reasonable alternative to assist inmates in the preparation of petitions for post-conviction relief, it may not validly enforce a regulation . . . barring inmates from furnishing such assistance to other prisoners.”). However, you have no right to demand the assistance of a specific jailhouse lawyer. See *Storseth v. Spellman*, 654 F.2d 1349, 1353 (9th Cir. 1981) (incarcerated person had no right to “services of a particular writ writer”); *Prisoners’ Legal Ass’n v. Robertson*, 822 F. Supp. 185, 190 (D.N.J. 1993) (holding an incarcerated person has no “right to the assistance of a particular prisoner”).

⁵⁴ *Johnson v. Avery*, 393 U.S. 483, 490, 89 S. Ct. 747, 751, 21 L. Ed. 2d 718, 724 (1969) (“[T]he State may impose reasonable restrictions and restraints upon the acknowledged propensity of prisoners to abuse both the giving and the seeking of assistance . . . for example, by limitations on the time and location of such activities”); *Sizemore v. Lee*, 20 F. Supp. 2d 956, 958 (W.D. Va. 1998) (holding that an incarcerated person can be ordered not to engage in writ writing on an individual basis when the security of the prison requires the order and that writ writers were not required where the prison provided incarcerated people with a law library and legal assistance).

⁵⁵ *Rivera v. Coughlin*, 210 A.D.2d 543, 544, 620 N.Y.S.2d 505, 506 (3d Dept. 1994) (upholding determination of disciplinary violation by an incarcerated person who sent a letter to the FBI on behalf of another incarcerated person without receiving prior approval for providing such assistance pursuant to state directives).

⁵⁶ *Bellamy v. Bradley*, 729 F.2d 416, 421 (6th Cir. 1984) (holding that an incarcerated person was not denied effective assistance of counsel where jailhouse lawyers were prohibited from visiting his cell because he could meet with them in the prison law library, which he did several times).

⁵⁷ *Johnson v. Avery*, 393 U.S. 483, 490, 89 S. Ct. 747, 751, 21 L. Ed. 2d 718, 724 (1969) (discussing the state’s power to regulate jailhouse lawyers in situations where they may be punished for receiving payment for legal assistance); *Henderson v. Ricketts*, 499 F. Supp. 1066, 1069 (D. Colo. 1980) (explaining that, while reasonable access to the court cannot be denied, “[c]ompensation to jailhouse lawyers by other inmates may be prohibited”).

incarcerated people “with paper and pen to draft legal documents, with notarial services to authenticate them, and with stamps to mail them.”⁵⁸ In other words, even if the state provides an adequate law library or assistance from persons trained in the law, they may still violate your right to access the courts if they fail to provide you with the materials necessary for drafting, notarizing, and mailing your legal documents.

There are a few important things to consider before claiming that you have been denied access to the courts based on the state’s failure to provide you with materials. First, you may not be entitled to all or any of the specific materials that you may request. For example, the courts have held that incarcerated people may be given pencils instead of the pens mentioned in *Bounds*,⁵⁹ that incarcerated people have no constitutional right to use or possess computers or typewriters,⁶⁰ that the state is not required in all cases to provide free photocopying,⁶¹ that the state need not provide unlimited free postage,⁶² and that a notary need not be available at all times.⁶³ Second, unlike its duty to provide adequate law libraries or assistance from persons trained in the law, the state’s duty to provide you with materials may only apply to indigent incarcerated people (those who cannot afford to pay for the materials on their own). You may need to research the laws and regulations in your state to determine what the accepted standard for indigence is in your correctional facility and in your state.⁶⁴ Third, your right of access to the courts is not unlimited: it

⁵⁸ *Bounds v. Smith*, 430 U.S. 817, 824–825, 97 S. Ct 1491, 1496, 52 L. Ed. 2d 72, 78 (1977) (affirming judgment that required the State to provide prison law libraries and other forms of legal assistance).

⁵⁹ *Canell v. Bradshaw*, 840 F. Supp. 1382, 1391 (D. Or. 1993) (“Security considerations may . . . justify the issuance of two-inch ‘golf’ pencils.” (citing *Jeffries v. Reed*, 631 F. Supp. 1212, 1215 (E.D. Wash. 1986))) *aff’d*, 97 F.3d 1458 (9th Cir. 1996). However, the court stated that if the incarcerated person had a medical condition that prevented him from drafting legal documents by hand with a two-inch pencil, then “a full-sized writing instrument or typewriter might become an indispensable tool for communicating with the court. If prison officials knew of this problem, then their denial of [the incarcerated person’s] request could constitute a deprivation of necessary legal supplies unless that action was justified by a sufficient penological interest.” *Canell v. Bradshaw*, 840 F. Supp. 1382, 1391 (D. Or. 1993).

⁶⁰ *See, e.g., Taylor v. Coughlin*, 29 F.3d 39, 40 (2d Cir. 1994) (finding “no constitutional right to typewriters as implements of access to the courts” and no “constitutional right to typewriters of a specific memory capacity”); *Sands v. Lewis*, 886 F.2d 1166, 1169 (9th Cir. 1989) (holding that incarcerated people have no constitutional right to a typewriter); *Am. Inmate Paralegal Ass’n v. Cline*, 859 F.2d 59, 61 (8th Cir. 1988) (“Prison inmates have no constitutional right of access to a typewriter, and prison officials are not required to provide one as long as the prisoner is not denied access to the courts.” (citation omitted)); *Walters v. Edgar*, 900 F. Supp. 197, 229 (N.D. Ill. 1995) (“[P]risons are not required to provide inmates with typewriters.”); *Howard v. Leonardo*, 845 F. Supp. 943, 946 (N.D.N.Y. 1994) (“[I]nmates have no constitutional right to the possession and use of a typewriter . . . since prisoners are not prejudiced by filing hand written briefs . . .” (citation omitted)); *Lehn v. Hartwig*, 13 F. App’x 389, 392 (7th Cir. 2001) (*unpublished*) (“If prisoners have no constitutional right to a typewriter, they certainly do not have one to a computer.” (citations omitted)). *But see Tuggle v. Barksdale*, 641 F. Supp. 34, 38 (W.D. Tenn. 1985) (holding that a jail must provide a sufficient number of usable typewriters in a legal room unless the typewriters are proven to be a security threat).

⁶¹ *Gittens v. Sullivan*, 670 F. Supp. 119, 122 (S.D.N.Y. 1987), *aff’d*, 848 F.2d 389 (2d Cir. 1988) (finding that providing carbon paper to incarcerated people was “sufficient to provide proper access to the courts . . . The State should not be forced to provide free access to copier machines for prisoner use when there is an acceptable, less costly substitute.”); *Dugar v. Coughlin*, 613 F. Supp. 849, 854 (S.D.N.Y. 1985) (noting that prisons may make incarcerated people pay for photocopies, as this is a “reasonable balance of the legitimate interests of both prisoners and the State”). *But see Canell v. Bradshaw*, 840 F. Supp. 1382, 1392 (D. Or. 1993) (holding that incarcerated people clearly have an established right to photocopying under certain circumstances).

⁶² *Gittens v. Sullivan*, 670 F. Supp. 119, 123 (S.D.N.Y. 1987) (holding that a provision of \$1.10 per week for stamps and an additional advance of \$36 for legal mailings to an indigent incarcerated person satisfied the constitutional minimum for access to the courts); *Dugar v. Coughlin*, 613 F. Supp. 849, 853 (S.D.N.Y. 1985) (upholding the directive providing that incarcerated people could mail 5 one-ounce letters per week for free but would have to pay for any mail weighing more than one ounce, or in excess of 5 one-ounce letters in one week, because “a prisoner’s constitutional right of access to the courts . . . does not require that prisoners be provided with unlimited free postage”); *see also Pacheco v. Comisse*, 897 F. Supp. 671, 681 (N.D.N.Y. 1995) (finding that Department of Correctional Services’ refusal to advance postage to an incarcerated person for legal mail did not violate the incarcerated person’s right of access to courts because the incarcerated person could not show that the delay interfered with an upcoming legal action).

⁶³ The courts have held that correctional facilities must provide incarcerated people with notary publics. *Tuggle v. Barksdale*, 641 F. Supp. 34, 39–40 (W.D. Tenn. 1985) (holding that the prison “must continue to afford notary publics for all inmates at all times”). However, correctional facilities do not need to make the notary services available 5 days a week. *Dugar v. Coughlin*, 613 F. Supp. 849, 854 (S.D.N.Y. 1985) (holding that incarcerated people do not have a constitutional right to notary services 5 days a week).

⁶⁴ *See, e.g., Gluth v. Kangas*, 951 F.2d 1504, 1508–1510 (9th Cir. 1991) (holding that the Department of Correction’s indigency policy, which only allowed an incarcerated person to apply for indigency classification if his prison account balance was less than \$12, was unconstitutional because it forced incarcerated people to choose between purchasing mandatory hygienic supplies and essential legal supplies, and concluding that an indigency standard of \$46 was more

may be lessened when balanced against the state's "legitimate interests, including budgetary concerns."⁶⁵ For example, a court could determine that the state's duty to provide you with materials is limited by state budgetary or security concerns. Fourth, the state's duty to assist you may be limited to only habeas corpus petitions and civil rights actions involving constitutional claims.⁶⁶

Finally, and most importantly, when you sue on the basis of the state's refusal to provide necessary materials, you also need to show that you suffered an "actual injury" as a direct result of that refusal. Because standards vary depending on where you are, you will need to research this "actual injury" requirement in your state and federal circuit. *Canell v. Bradshaw* is an example of Oregon's particular requirements.⁶⁷ In *Canell*, an incarcerated person claimed that he was denied access to the courts because the state would not make photocopies for him. The court stated that in order for him to prove that the state had deprived him of meaningful access to the courts, he had to show that: (1) he wanted to copy specific documents that could not be duplicated longhand—in other words, the documents were too long for the incarcerated person to copy them himself with pen and paper; (2) those documents had to be filed with the court as part of a specific document; (3) he had told prison officials of this need; (4) his request was denied in accordance with a policy promulgated by the defendants; (5) those documents were relevant and necessary to his particular case; and (6) the documents had to be left out of the filing as a result of the prison officials' refusal to provide photocopying services.⁶⁸

Remember, if you are going to pursue this type of action, you must bring a Section 1983 or a *Bivens* claim. Please refer to Chapter 16 of the *JLM*, "Using 42 U.S.C. § 1983 to Obtain Relief from Violations of Federal Law," for more details on these claims.

G. The State's Duty in the Internet Age

Internet and database search technologies have revolutionized legal research in recent decades and dramatically increased the accessibility of court documents and legal knowledge. Despite this, courts have not recognized a right to use these tools.⁶⁹

H. Conclusion

In this Chapter, you have learned that if you (1) exhaust your prison's administrative remedies for getting your complaint heard, (2) are not able to go to court or are hindered in pursuit of your claim by state interference, and (3) suffer an injury as a result of the state's interference or denial of your right to access the courts, you may pursue a claim against the state. You can request that the state provide you with access to an adequate law library, adequate assistance from someone trained in the law, or some other legal access program. While a state can regulate its jails and prisons for the purpose of discipline and safety, it cannot completely deny an incarcerated person's right of access to the courts.

appropriate).

⁶⁵ See *Gittens v. Sullivan*, 670 F. Supp. 119, 122 (S.D.N.Y. 1987) ("The State should not be forced to provide free access to copier machines for prisoner use when there is an acceptable, less costly substitute."); *Dugar v. Coughlin*, 613 F. Supp. 849, 853–854 (S.D.N.Y. 1985) (holding that making incarcerated people pay for photocopies is a "reasonable balance of the legitimate interests of both prisoners and the State").

⁶⁶ See *Lewis v. Casey*, 518 U.S. 343, 354–355, 116 S. Ct. 2174, 2181–2182, 135 L. Ed. 2d 606, 620 (1996) (holding that *Bounds* only requires states to provide tools that "inmates need in order to attack their sentences, directly or collaterally, and in order to challenge the conditions of their confinement. Impairment of any *other* litigating capacity is simply one of the incidental (and perfectly constitutional) consequences of conviction and incarceration.").

⁶⁷ *Canell v. Bradshaw*, 840 F. Supp. 1382 (D. Or. 1993), *aff'd*, 97 F.3d 1458 (9th Cir. 1996).

⁶⁸ Compare *Canell v. Bradshaw*, 840 F. Supp. 1382, 1392 (D. Or. 1993), with *Woodward v. Subia*, No. CIV S-07-498 JAM KJM P, 2008 U.S. Dist. LEXIS 85271, at *5 (E.D. Cal. Sept. 10, 2008) (*unpublished*) (holding that the confiscation of an incarcerated person's computer, which the incarcerated person claimed contained materials that would set him free, was too vague to demonstrate actual injury).

⁶⁹ See, e.g., *Darby v. Schmalenberger*, No. 1:12-CV-033, 2012 U.S. Dist. LEXIS 160858, at *19–20 (D.N.D. May 7, 2012) (*unpublished*) (holding that incarcerated people have "neither a right to internet access nor a right to file electronically" because the state prison has a "legitimate penological interest in restricting inmates' internet access").

Pursuing a claim has several requirements. First, you must show that you suffered an actual injury from the state's failure to provide you with an adequate opportunity to raise your claim.⁷⁰ Second, some state courts have held that the state only needs to provide you with an adequate law library or legal access program if you want to pursue federal habeas corpus petitions or state or federal civil rights actions. Third, although the state gets to decide what type of legal access you will get, it must provide you with meaningful access to the courts.⁷¹ Fourth, the state must follow the requirements laid out in this Chapter whether or not you are considered indigent. Finally, the state can reasonably limit your ability to use the library or other legal access programs.

⁷⁰ See *Lewis v. Casey*, 518 U.S. 343, 350–351, 116 S. Ct. 2174, 2179–2180, 135 L. Ed. 2d 606, 616 (1996) (explaining that there is no general right to a law library or legal assistance except as they relate to an incarcerated person's actual ability to access the courts).

⁷¹ *Williams v. Leeke*, 584 F.2d 1336, 1339 (4th Cir. 1978) (“Under *Bounds*, the state is duty bound to assure prisoners some form of meaningful access to the courts. But states remain free to satisfy that duty in a variety of ways.”).

Appendix A

DIRECTORY OF SELECTED LAW LIBRARIES OFFERING SERVICES TO INCARCERATED PERSONS AND OF ONLINE LEGAL RESOURCES^{*72*}

This Appendix provides information about online resources you can use for your legal research. Part A covers general online resources. Part B covers circuit-specific library and online resources. Lastly, Part C covers state-specific library and online resources. The information is divided by region to help you with your research. For example, if you are interested in state resources, you can refer to Part C.

A. General Online Resources

Cornell University Law School Legal Information Institute (LII): <http://www.law.cornell.edu>

LII is a great free online legal resource of federal and state statutes, summaries of laws, a legal encyclopedia, federal cases, and more. The LII is really good for finding statutes, learning the meaning of legal terms, and reading summaries of laws. You may have to register to access some of the site's information, but registration is free and only requires you to provide an email address for email confirmation.

FindLaw: <http://www.findlaw.com>

FindLaw is a good resource for learning about various areas of the law. There are over a dozen subjects, including criminal law, DUI, marriage/family and divorce law, civil rights, and more. The site provides a detailed and straightforward description of these areas of the law. FindLaw also has a legal forum, a blog, a current events section, and a question-and-answer section.

Lexis Web: <http://www.lexisweb.com>

^{72:*} These are the libraries or facilities that provide materials in states where the most *JLMs* are sold. If you live in a different state than those listed, you should contact law school or governmental law libraries in your state.

Lexis Web provides a range of material on legal matters, but it costs money to access most of the content.

Wikipedia: <http://www.wikipedia.org>

Wikipedia is a general online resource that also has information about legal issues. Wikipedia offers a broad range of information, including case summaries, case citations, the history of the case or legal topic, definitions of legal terms, and more. Wikipedia provides straightforward information about some issues that may be more complicated to understand. It is important to remember that some of the information on Wikipedia is provided by the general public, so the information on the website may not always be correct. It is a good idea to double-check the information on Wikipedia with another source.

B. Federal Cases Online

PACER: <http://www.pacer.gov>

pacer@psc.uscourts.gov

PACER Service Center Number: (800) 676-6856

Public Access to Court Electronic Records (PACER) is an electronic service that provides public access to information about cases that have been filed in the federal courts. PACER allows anyone, including incarcerated people, to obtain information about cases filed in federal district, appellate, and bankruptcy courts. In addition to opinions, PACER includes case docket information and may provide briefs and other filings from the parties.

PACER is not free. To use it, users must register online to receive a login and password. Fees for viewing cases online are \$0.10 per page.

The Supreme Court: <http://www.supremecourt.gov/opinions/opinions.aspx>

The Supreme Court website is a limited resource. The website contains a searchable database that is limited to opinions that have been issued since 2007. For an entire list of cases, you can click on the "Opinions" link. It also contains PDF versions of the complete volumes of cases dating back to 1991.

D.C. Circuit: <http://www.cadc.uscourts.gov/internet/opinions.nsf>

The D.C. Circuit's official website provides all published D.C. Circuit opinions and summary orders and selected unpublished decisions since 1997 at no cost.

1st Circuit: <http://www.ca1.uscourts.gov/?content=opinions/main.php>

The First Circuit's official website provides First Circuit opinions and summary orders since 1992 at no cost. Opinions and orders before 1999 are available in HTML form only. Later opinions may be downloaded in PDF or WordPerfect form.

2nd Circuit: <http://www.ca2.uscourts.gov/decisions.html>

The Second Circuit's official website provides Second Circuit opinions and summary orders since 2002 at no cost.

3rd Circuit: <http://www.ca3.uscourts.gov/search-opinions>

The Third Circuit's official website provides Third Circuit opinions and summary orders since 1994 at no cost.

4th Circuit: <http://pacer.ca4.uscourts.gov/opinions/opinion.htm>

The Fourth Circuit's official website provides Fourth Circuit opinions and summary orders since 1996 at no cost.

5th Circuit: <http://www.ca5.uscourts.gov/Opinions.aspx>

The Fifth Circuit's official website provides Fifth Circuit opinions and summary orders since 1992 at no cost. The opinions are also available in a searchable database and for bulk download.

Keyword Search: <http://www.ca5.uscourts.gov:8081>

Bulk Download Server: <ftp://opinions.ca5.uscourts.gov> (Note: Accessing the download database requires accessing an FTP server. This may not be available due to restrictions on your internet access.)

6th Circuit: <http://www.ca6.uscourts.gov/opinions/opinion.php>

The Sixth Circuit's official website provides published Sixth Circuit opinions since 2000 and unpublished opinions since 2004 at no cost. The opinions are also available in a searchable database and for bulk download.

7th Circuit: <http://media.ca7.uscourts.gov/opinion.html>

The Seventh Circuit's official website provides access to both published and unpublished opinions since 1999, as well as selected unpublished court orders, oral arguments, and other court documents from that period.

The court's primary database must be searched by docket number. The court's library provides a complete listing of all decisions dating from 2007, along with a series of relevant terms for each decision on a single webpage (<https://www.lb7.uscourts.gov/ArchivedURLSeventhCircuit.pdf>). The court recommends using a web browser's "Find" function to perform a keyword search of these opinions. To use this function, press "Control" and the "F" button (when using a Windows computer) or "Command" and the "F" button (when using an Apple computer).

8th Circuit: <http://www.ca8.uscourts.gov/all-opinions>

The Eight Circuit's official website provides all published Eighth Circuit opinions, summary orders, and selected unpublished decisions since 1995 at no cost. The database is searchable by docket number, keyword, party name, and attorney name. The website also includes audio recordings of oral arguments for all cases argued since September 2009. To find an oral argument, use the "One Stop Search" option.

9th Circuit: <http://www.ca9.uscourts.gov/opinions>

The Ninth Circuit's official website provides all published Ninth Circuit opinions and summary orders since 1995 and unpublished opinions since 2002 at no cost. For published opinions prior to January 3, 2005, you can contact the clerk's office at (413) 355-8000.

Published Opinions (2005–Present): <http://www.ca9.uscourts.gov/opinions>

Unpublished Opinions (November 2009–Present): <http://www.ca9.uscourts.gov/memoranda>

Unpublished Opinions (December 2008–November 2009): http://www.ca9.uscourts.gov/memoranda_archive

For unpublished opinions prior to December 2008, you may call the clerk's office at (413) 355-8000 or send a request via email to CA09Public_Information@ca9.uscourts.gov.

10th Circuit: <http://www.ca10.uscourts.gov/clerk/opinions.php>

The Tenth Circuit's official website provides all published opinions from 1995 and all unpublished opinions from 1996 at no cost. The database is searchable by date, docket number, and keyword.

11th Circuit: <http://www.ca11.uscourts.gov/opinions>

The Eighth Circuit's official website provides all published Eighth Circuit opinions and summary orders since 1995 and all unpublished decisions since 2005 at no cost.

Published Opinions: <http://www.ca11.uscourts.gov/published-opinions>

Unpublished Opinions: <http://www.ca11.uscourts.gov/unpublished-opinions>

C. Online and Library Resources by State

If your state is not listed, you or someone you know should check the Southern Center for Human Rights webpage (<http://www.schr.org>) for organizations in your state providing other legal materials to incarcerated people.

CALIFORNIA

Internet Resources

Many decisions of California's appellate courts are available online (including all decisions published or ordered for publication). Some California Superior Court decisions are also available online.

A note about the California court system:

- California's trial court is the California Superior Court.
- The California Courts of Appeals are the second-highest courts, and the California Supreme Court is the highest court. So, appeals from a California Superior Court are heard by the California Courts of Appeal first. Appeals from any California Court of Appeal are then heard by the California Supreme Court.

(1) California Appellate Decisions

The California Official Reports: <http://www.lexisnexis.com/clients/CACourts>

All published California state appellate court decisions are available online at no cost. LexisNexis, the official publisher of the California Reports, provides access to opinions from 1850 to the present. The California Official Reports website is updated monthly, and decisions are generally made available online within sixty days of filing.

Appellate Slip Opinions: <http://www.courts.ca.gov/opinions.htm>

Slip opinions, which are uncorrected California opinions that have been filed, are available for free online at the California Courts official website. Slip opinions are opinions that have not been officially published in the California Reports but have been ordered to be published. Slip opinions are only available for recent matters—specifically, opinions that have been filed within the last 120 days. It is generally preferable to cite California Reports, if available, as these include corrections and other changes that will not be incorporated into the slip opinions.

Unpublished Appellate Opinions: <http://www.courts.ca.gov/opinions-nonpub.htm>

Unpublished California appellate opinions are available online for up to 60 days on the California Courts official website.

(2) California Trial Court Decisions

The Guide to California Court Records: <http://www.courtreference.com/California-Courts.htm>

Some California Superior Court opinions and docket information can be found online at the Guide to California Courts website.

Library Resources

Oakland **Alameda County Law Library**
125 12th Street
Oakland, CA 94607
(510) 208-4832
<http://www.acgov.org/law/index.htm>

This library serves incarcerated people in Alameda County. Photocopies are \$1/page plus a \$10 handling fee, tax, postage and prepayment. Emailed materials are \$15/citation. The library requires correct citations and will not conduct legal research. Additional details about document delivery: <http://www.acgov.org/law/feeservices/docdelivery.htm>

Los Angeles **Los Angeles County Law Library**
301 W. First Street
Los Angeles, CA 90012
(213) 785-2529
<http://www.lalawlibrary.org/>

This library serves incarcerated people and other institution residents in California. No material is loaned. Correct citations are required, and limited reference work is done. Prepayment is required. A debit account is formed with the library, and the library charges the debit account. The library emails or faxes the requested material.

Photocopies: \$12.00 transaction charge per document for the first 25 pages (includes postage and tax) and sales tax if applicable. \$0.25 per page after the first 25 pages. Ask to speak to Christine.

Payee: Los Angeles County Law Library

San Diego **San Diego County Public Law Library**
1105 Front Street
San Diego, CA 92101-3904
(619) 531-3900
<http://sandiegolawlibrary.org/>

This library serves incarcerated people and other institutional residents located at institutions in California. It lends materials to the incarcerated people of San Diego County Jail under procedures set up by the Sheriff under a federal court consent decree. Loan periods are 1, 3, or 7 days. Correct citations are required.

Photocopies: For mail, email, and local fax (for people with a San Diego area code), the price is \$15 for a package of 20 pages or less. For every additional page over 20 pages, the rate is \$1.25 per page. For long-distance faxes (for area codes outside of San Diego), the price is \$30 for a group of 20 pages or less, and for every additional page the price is \$2.25. On the website, click on a link called “document request,” which will provide a document delivery form on which you can make your document requests.

Payee: San Diego County Public Law Library

Santa Clara **Heafey Law Library**
Attn: Prisoner Requests
Santa Clara University
500 El Camino Real
Santa Clara, CA 95053
(408) 554-4452
<http://law.scu.edu/library>

The Heafey Law Library no longer provides services to individual incarcerated people. Interlibrary loan is the only way this library can offer material. The material is provided only to the prison libraries. However, the material that can be requested is limited. Heafey Law Library does not provide the following material: case reporters (including case law), statutes, journals, and treatises.

Ventura **Ventura County Law Library**
800 South Victoria Avenue
Ventura, CA 93009-2020
(805) 642-8982
<http://vencolawlib.org>

This library serves incarcerated people in California. Correct citations are required, and only available material is provided. Available material may include cases, statutes, and journal articles.

Photocopies: The first three pages are free. After three pages, the fee is \$0.25 per page, plus postage. Prepayment by cash or check is required; limit of 20 pages per letter.

Payee: Ventura County Law Library

LOUISIANA

Internet Resources

(1) Louisiana Appellate Decisions and Supreme Court Decisions

Published Appellate Opinions:

The Louisiana Court of Appeals is made up of five circuit courts. Appellate opinions from each of the five circuits are accessible through the links provided on the website. Additionally, access to Supreme Court materials is available through a hyperlink on the site.

Louisiana Supreme Court: <http://www.lasc.org>

Louisiana First Circuit Court of Appeal: <http://www.la-fcca.org>

Louisiana Second Circuit Court of Appeal: <http://www.la2nd.org>

Louisiana Third Circuit Court of Appeal: <http://www.la3circuit.org>

Louisiana Fourth Circuit Court of Appeal: <http://www.la4th.org>

Louisiana Fifth Circuit Court of Appeal: <http://www.fifthcircuit.org>

Library Resources

Statewide **State Library of Louisiana**
P.O. Box 131
Baton Rouge, LA 70821-0131
(225) 342-4913

<http://www.state.lib.la.us/about-the-state-library/policies/interlibrary-loan-policy>

This library serves only in-state institutions. No material is loaned. Photocopies are made by request.

NEW JERSEY

Internet Resources

(1) New Jersey Appellate Decisions and Supreme Court Decisions

Published Appellate Opinions: <http://njlaw.rutgers.edu/collections/courts>

The Rutgers University Law Library maintains a free online database containing all of the New Jersey Supreme Court opinions and published appellate opinions issued since 1995. Additionally, the database contains all unpublished appellate opinions issued since 2005. Library staff may be contacted via email to assist users.

Library Contact: courtweb@camlaw.rutgers.edu

Recent Appellate Opinions: <http://www.judiciary.state.nj.us/opinions/index.htm>

All appellate opinions are available on the New Jersey Judiciary official website for ten business days after filing. After that period, the decisions will be available in the Rutgers University database.

Unpublished Appellate Opinions: <http://njlaw.rutgers.edu/collections/courts>

Unpublished appellate decisions filed after September 20, 2005 are available in the Rutgers University database. Unpublished decisions filed before that date are maintained by the Appellate Division and cannot be accessed electronically.

Appellate Division Contact: (609) 984-5761

(2) New Jersey Trial Court Decisions

Recent Published Opinions: <http://www.judiciary.state.nj.us/decisions/index.htm>

Certain trial court opinions are made available for six weeks on the New Jersey Judiciary official website. This service is provided for the convenience of the parties involved in the cases.

Recent Unpublished Opinions: <https://www.njcourts.gov/attorneys/opinions/unpublished-trial>

Library Resources

Newark **Seton Hall Law School, Rodino Law Library**
One Newark Center
1109 Raymond Boulevard
Newark, NJ 07102
(973) 642-8720
<http://law.shu.edu/library>

This library only provides documents via email or fax. Specific citations are required. Note that there is no formal document delivery service at this library, and the librarians who receive the request have the discretion to decide whether to fulfill the request. There are no fees.

Trenton **New Jersey State Library**
185 West State Street
Trenton, NJ 08608

(609) 278-2640

<http://www.njstatelib.org>

For in-state service, the fees are as follows: \$3 per citation plus \$0.50 per page. The minimum fee is \$5.00. For out-of-state requests, the fees are \$3 per citation plus \$1 per page. The minimum fee is \$10. For both in-state and out-of-state, you may request a maximum of 100 pages. The material will be emailed to the appropriate prison administrator. There are no additional fees for emailing. The library does not work directly with incarcerated people. Instead, incarcerated people must make their requests to the appropriate prison administrator, who will then make that request with the library on their behalf.

NEW YORK

Internet Resources

Many decisions from New York State's trial and appellate courts are available online.

A note about the New York State court system:

- The New York State Unified Court System is, like other states, divided into three levels, but the terminology used for these three levels differs from other states.
- The New York Supreme Court is New York State's trial court (the lowest level court). It is the primary civil court in New York and also hears criminal prosecutions of felonies. The New York Supreme Court, Appellate Division is New York's second highest court and hears appeals from the New York Supreme Court. The New York Court of Appeals is New York State's highest court and makes decisions that bind all of New York's lower Courts.

(1) New York Appellate Court Decisions

New York Official Reports Decisions: <http://www.courts.state.ny.us/reporter/Decisions.htm>

Provides free access to New York Supreme Court, Appellate Division and New York Court of Appeals decisions and motions. Coverage begins from roughly 2003, depending on the type of filing being searched.

New York Official Reports Services: <http://government.westlaw.com/nyofficial>

Provides free access to all decisions appellate decisions published in the New York Official Reports since 1980. Has select coverage of landmark and other notable decisions prior to 1980.

(2) New York Trial Court Decisions

New York Supreme Court: <http://decisions.courts.state.ny.us/search/query3.asp>

Provides New York Supreme Court Civil and Criminal Cases from select counties since 2001.

Library Resources

Albany

Prisoner Services Project—New York State Library

Cultural Education Center

222 Madison Avenue

Albany, NY 12230

(518) 474-5355

<http://www.nysl.nysed.gov/index.html>

This library serves only incarcerated people located at institutions operated by the New York State Department of Correctional Services. To access library services, you should send a letter to the library, and the library will respond by sending you the proper forms. Some prison libraries already have these forms available, so it is best to check with your prison library first. No material is loaned, and all materials must be law-related. Correct citations are required, and limited reference work is done. No legal advice is given. If the requested material is covered by the project (e.g., case law, statutes, etc.), there is no charge for photocopies. If the material is *not* covered, there will be a \$10 fee for every group of 10 pages (for example, if you requested 11 pages, the fee is \$20). Prepayment is required.

VIRGINIA

Internet Resources:

(1) Virginia Supreme Court and Appellate Court Decisions

Virginia Supreme Court and Court of Appeals: <http://www.courts.state.va.us/search/textopinions.html>

Provides Supreme Court of Virginia decisions from June 9, 1995; published Court of Appeals of Virginia opinions from May 2, 1995; and unpublished Court of Appeals of Virginia opinions from March 5, 2002.

Library Resources

Williamsburg **Wolf Law Library**
 William and Mary School of Law
 P.O. Box 8795
 Williamsburg, VA 23187-8795
 (757) 221-3255
<http://law.wm.edu/library/home/index.php>

The library will provide cases if correct citations are given. No legal advice is given. In addition, incarcerated people may borrow certain materials that circulate (books and treatises, not statutes or case reporters) through inter-library loan if their prison library has an official ILL program. Alternatively, photocopies of documents can be used.

Photocopies: Prepayment is required. \$10 per citation plus \$.15 per page. \$.30 per page for microforms. Payment is by check, money order, or cash.

Payee: Wolf Law Library

TEXAS

Internet Resources

(1) Texas Supreme Court and Appellate Court Decisions

Supreme Court of Texas and Texas Courts of Appeals: <https://search.txcourts.gov/CaseSearch.aspx>

Provides free access to Texas Supreme Court and Courts of Appeals decisions and case information.

Library Resources

Lubbock **Texas Tech University Law Library**
 1802 Hartford Avenue
 Lubbock, Texas 79409-0004
 (806) 742-3957
<http://www.law.ttu.edu/lawlibrary>

Photocopies: Specific citations only. \$15 per citation plus \$.50 per page. Prepayment is required. Only money orders are accepted. To submit a request, send a letter to the address

above with the specific citations. The library will send an invoice with the total cost. After you send the money order, the documents will be delivered.

Payee: Texas Tech University Law Library