

H A R L A N R I C H A R D S

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Watch Batteries In Prison

I have a wrist watch that I purchased in 2006 when I was in Gordon Correctional Center to use when I went down to the river to meditate. I didn't want to get into trouble by coming back to the center late for count or meal times. About every 3 years I have to order a new watch battery.

On Christmas day 2013, my watch battery died. I am required to purchase a new battery from Union Supply, a company that has an exclusive contract with the Wis. DOC for providing watch batteries (among other things). I ordered a battery and 4 weeks later my money was refunded with no explanation. I reordered a battery and again 4 weeks later my money was refunded with no explanation.

I wrote to the property sergeant and explained what happened. I asked for permission to order a watch battery from someone else. By this time, 3 months had gone by. The sergeant told me the battery was out of stock. Duh! I wrote to the property captain and he told me to write to the sergeant again. I knew that was a waste of time so I ordered the battery again from the same company. Four weeks later my money was refunded. I wrote to the property sergeant again asking for permission to order a battery from another vendor. He responded by telling me that the company had 7 batteries in stock and that I should reorder a battery right away. It had now been 5 months since my battery died. I promptly ordered a battery for the 4th time and 4 weeks later my money was refunded with explanation.

Finally, after 6 months and 4 refunded orders, I was given permission to order a battery from someone else. I called my cousin and asked her to order a battery for me online. The following week I had a new battery for my watch.

I could have had a new battery in a week instead of 6 months had the DOC not created a policy requiring me to purchase batteries from Union Supply. There's only one word that can describe this - ridiculous! I'm posting this blog so people in the free world can get some idea of what passes for normal in prison.