

H A R L A N   R I C H A R D S

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No Tablet Computers For Wisconsin Prisoners

For the past year, prisoners have been told that kiosks are going to be installed in prisons and that we will be able to download music and receive emails. We have been anxiously waiting for this new, great development. But, alas, it was too good to be true.

According to the latest rumor, the DOC told Keefe (the email provider who won the contract bid) that they had to use the DOC's server to set up the email service. The contract authorizes Keefe to use their own server. Keefe demanded that the DOC stick to the terms of the contract, so the DOC reneged on the contract.

Here's what I think really happened. Previous DOC Secretary Ed Wall was an outsider who was forcing the DOC to come into the 21st century. He was behind the email access. Secretary Wall was forced out over the Lincoln Hills scandal and a previous secretary was reappointed. Jon Litscher is a DOC loyalist who thinks like the rest of the DOC bureaucrats. Once he was back in charge, DOC officials had to find a way to undo the progress that Secretary Wall made. It's not about what server gets used. It was a pretext to justify voiding the contract and stopping prisoners from getting email.

The DOC EDNET computer system (which prisoners have limited access to) is based on software and computers that are 15 or more years old. There's no way a current email provider could adapt their system to interface with the antique prison network. The EDNET system is so slow and overloaded that it often takes prisoner clerks up to 45 minutes to log on so they can do their prison jobs. The memory and processing capability is so limited that current windows operating systems cannot be installed or run on them.

This is just another example of the Wisconsin DOC putting their emphasis on reinforcing their power and control rather than doing what's best for the prisoners.

But perhaps I am mistaken. Perhaps it is just a contract dispute which will be worked out after all. If so, then you'll be able to read all about me eating my words in a future blog.