



FREEDOM READS



Maryland's First Freedom Libraries to Open in Adult and Youth Correctional Facilities

Freedom Libraries, conceived by former prisoner-turned-acclaimed-poet, open at Baltimore City Juvenile Justice Center and Dorsey Run Correctional Facility

JESSUP and BALTIMORE CITY, MD (June 7, 2023) - The national non-profit [Freedom Reads](#) announced today the opening tomorrow, Thursday, June 8, 2023, of four Freedom Libraries Thursday afternoon at [Dorsey Run Correctional Facility](#) in Jessup, MD in partnership with the Department of Public Safety and Correctional Services (DPSCS) and eleven Libraries Thursday morning at the [Baltimore City Juvenile Justice Center](#) in partnership with the Department of Juvenile Services (DJS). The Freedom Libraries will be placed in the facilities' housing units for unfettered access to a 500-book collection donated by the non-profit organization. Dorsey Run Correctional Facility and Baltimore City Juvenile Justice Center will be the first Maryland institutions to open Freedom Libraries, with other facilities expected to open libraries in 2023. The openings will be attended by Secretary Carolyn J. Scruggs from DPSCS and Secretary Vincent Schiraldi from DJS, who will also both be speaking at the afternoon event.

The brainchild of 2021 MacArthur Fellow, Marylander, and Yale Law School graduate [Reginald Dwayne Betts](#) who was sentenced to nine years in prison at age 16, the [Freedom Libraries](#) are placed where people in prisons and youth programs spend guaranteed time: in the housing units, where there aren't barriers to access, where reaching for a book can be as spontaneous as human curiosity. Each bookshelf is handcrafted out of maple, walnut or cherry and is curved to contrast the straight lines and bars of prisons as well as to evoke Martin Luther King Jr.'s line about the "arc of the universe" bending "toward justice."

As part of the opening of the Freedom Libraries, Reginald Dwayne Betts will perform his one-man show [Felon: An American Washi Tale](#), in which he explores the lingering consequences of having a criminal record, fatherhood, the power of literature, and love. The show is based on Betts' 2019 poetry collection [Felon](#).

"In a very real way, freedom begins with a book. With the opening of these libraries, we are creating opportunities for daily engagement with literature and a space in prison for reading, community, and imagination," said Reginald Dwayne Betts, Founder and CEO of Freedom Reads. "When you're in your cell, you just look out at concrete, a sanitized environment. There's nothing natural there. There's nothing beautiful. The Freedom Library project is not just about books, but it's also about beauty and a level of dignity. We are grateful to DPSCS and DJS for sharing our goal of bringing beauty, books, and people inside to transform lives."

"Education is proven to reduce recidivism, and often, education begins with somebody picking up a book," says Carolyn J. Scruggs, Secretary of the Maryland Department of Public Safety and Correctional Services. "We're very grateful to Freedom Reads for this opportunity to expand our facility libraries."

“It’s a pleasure to collaborate with Dwayne Betts and his Freedom Reads program to bring books to our kids, reducing idle time because they couldn’t get a book at the facility library,” said Maryland Secretary of Juvenile Services Vincent N. Schiraldi. “This is a one of a kind program that will allow our youth the opportunity to gain knowledge and improve their literacy skills, and will help them as they return to the community.”

About Freedom Reads:

Founded by Reginald Dwayne Betts, who knows firsthand the dispiriting forces of prison, Freedom Reads works to empower people through literature to confront what prison does to the spirit. Supported by the Andrew W. Mellon Foundation and inspired by the recognition that freedom begins with a book, Freedom Reads supports the efforts of people in prison to transform their lives through increased access to books and writers. For more information about Freedom Reads and the Freedom Libraries project please visit <https://freedomreads.org/>.

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