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Contact: Garrett Conti
412-350-1267 (office)
garrett.conti@alleghenycounty.us

Harper Announces Deployment of OverDrive eBook Library on Inmate Tablets

PITTSBURGH – Warden Orlando Harper today announced that the OverDrive eBook application has been deployed facility-wide, providing incarcerated individuals at the Allegheny County Jail (ACJ) with access to hundreds of additional free eBooks through their tablets.

Close to 400 new eBooks and over 50 audiobooks will be added to a digital library that already includes over 200 books and 49 religious texts. The ACJ eBook library will continue to grow into the future, as the facility works with OverDrive to provide more free reading options to inmates. A full listing of the catalog is available on the Library Services page of the jail's website.

The Jail announced its partnership with OverDrive in November. The company is a digital distributor of eBooks which works with over 50,000 libraries and schools in 78 different countries. In Allegheny County, OverDrive provides digital reading options for established entities like the University of Pittsburgh and the Carnegie Library of Pittsburgh.

The collaboration with Carnegie Library of Pittsburgh continues to progress as the two organizations work to make the library's robust collection of eBooks and audiobooks available to inmates. Carnegie Library has close to 100,000 eBooks and 25,000 audiobooks in its OverDrive collection.

OverDrive works much like a digital library. An inmate may check out one book on his or her tablet for seven days. Once that time period is up, the book is checked back into the collection and made accessible to others in the facility. Inmates may also put holds on books and will be notified through the tablet when the book becomes available.

In addition to the eBook initiative, the facility received just over 10,000 donated books and several hundred magazines from the community through the end of 2020 book drive. With that, the facility has close to 25,000 physical books on hand to rotate through the housing units for inmates. New books and magazines are being processed through a security check and classified for distribution by the jail's HOPE Chaplaincy Services Office. These physical collections include a variety of genres, reading levels, authors and languages. A physical lending library is located on each housing unit where inmates may sign out books. Books are rotated on and off of the housing units from a central location.

Family members and friends of incarcerated individuals continue to have the ability to order books for inmates from barnesandnoble.com and christianbooks.com. Approximately 30-60 books are sent to inmates at the facility in this manner each month.

The inmate tablet program began at the facility in October. Incarcerated individuals have unlimited daily use of tablets between 9 a.m. and 10 p.m. Besides books, inmates have free access to health and wellness and educational programs and a legal library. Paid services include video visitation, phone calls, text messaging, videogames, news and streaming services for movies and music.

More information on the library services available to inmates can be found here:
<https://www.alleghenycounty.us/jail/library-services.aspx>.

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Orlando L. Harper, Warden

Allegheny County Jail

950 Second Avenue | Pittsburgh, PA 15219

Phone: 412-350-2000 | Fax: 412-350-2032

www.alleghenycounty.us

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