

# ACLU of Wisconsin: Commends Waukesha County Jail for lifting religious text and practice restrictions in local jail

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WAUKESHA – The Waukesha County Jail has denounced a practice which previously limited incarcerated individuals of the Muslim faith from having access to a Quran and Halal diet after the ACLU of Wisconsin wrote a letter calling for the jail to comply with constitutional standards that protect religious freedom.

Although the jail has provided incarcerated people with a Bible, 28-year-old Shayne Longley, a member of the Muslim faith, entered the Waukesha County Jail, was told if he wanted to read Quran he would have to purchase one from the commissary. Longley was also denied access to a Halal diet which is food and drink permissible for Muslims to consume.

“I was feeling upset. I was shocked,” Longley said. “I didn’t see how they could deny me a Quran and halal diet. I felt discriminated against.”

After contemplating his options, Longley reached out to the ACLU of Wisconsin. “I knew I needed to speak out because it was never really about me or money or anything. I didn’t want any other Muslim brother or sister coming here to go through what I went through,” said Longley. “I wanted to make a change. That’s when I wrote to the ACLU.”

Longley spoke with Asma Kadri Keeler, ACLU of Wisconsin staff attorney, who after hearing his story, wanted to help. “Freedom of religion is fundamental to our democracy and guaranteed by the First Amendment and penal institutions have a

constitutional obligation to accommodate the sincerely held religious beliefs of those in their custody. It is so important that people incarcerated in our jails and prison have the ability to practice their religion. If the jail provides access to Bibles free of charge, they should also provide religious texts for those practicing religions other than Christianity.”

As a direct result of Longley’s willingness to advocate for his freedom of religion, and Keeler’s letter to jail officials, the Waukesha County Jail secured more Qurans to provide to incarcerated individuals, as well as tablets that will be available for an hour each day to those housed there, which will provide access to 40 different religious texts. In addition, the Waukesha County Jail has entered into a contract with a new food service provider and has committed to providing Halal diets to incarcerated Muslim individuals.

“I want people to know that nobody should be treated differently no matter what religion you are, no matter what skin color you are, or no matter what the media portrays Islam to be,” Longley said.

“We want to commend the Waukesha County Jail for its willingness to correct their practice of preferencing Christianity over other religions and fulfill its constitutional obligation to accommodate all religious beliefs. We will continue to monitor the situation and ensure that all religious texts are available to those who request them regardless of their ability to pay,” Keeler said. “The rights of incarcerated individuals are too often infringed upon and even more so for those who are indigent. We hope that other jails across the state will see this positive change at the Waukesha County Jail and guarantee religious rights to those in their custody.”