

Judge Eyes Censor Ban In Prisons

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RICHMOND, July 12 (AP)

A federal judge here yesterday indicated he may abolish the Virginia penal system ban on inmate dealings with news men personally and through the mail.

U.S. District Court Judge Robert R. Merhige Jr. strongly indicated at the end of a two-day trial on prison censorship that he would order a revision of the state's inmate censorship code.

He took the matter under advisement but did not say when he would issue a ruling.

Under present rules, prison censors are forbidden from reading inmate mail going to and coming from their lawyers and the courts. The normal practice is to open the inbound legal mail in the presence of the inmate to check for contraband.

However, Philip J. Hirschkop, an American Civil Liberties Union attorney representing the inmates, charged that mail to his organization has been opened by prison officials.