

April 23, 2014

Helene Combs Dreiling FAIA  
President  
American Institute of Architects  
1735 New York Avenue  
Washington, DC

Dear Helene,

The Boston Society of Architects is writing to endorse a proposed amendment to the AIA Code of Ethics which was initiated by Architects / Designers / Planners for Social Responsibility (ADPSR), a group that has long held a loose affiliation with many social activists at the BSA. As you are aware, ADPSR is lobbying a number of organizations, including the AIA, to address human rights issues in correctional facilities design and operations in the United States. While this letter of support is similar to letters you have received from other AIA chapters, including San Francisco and Portland, we would like to add our own particular endorsement and emphasize the need for national AIA action on this issue for three reasons:

- 1) The BSA has a particularly rich history within the AIA in leading conversations about ethics.
- 2) Our Ethics Committee has been carefully deliberating the ADPSR proposal for a number of months, and is endorsing the proposal after thorough and extensive conversation and analysis.
- 3) The issue of controversial practices within correctional facilities, especially in the use of solitary confinement, has been of growing national interest, and as professionals and citizens we recognize the urgency for action.

Generally, we recognize the dilemma presented to architects when asked to design facilities or spaces that may be used for or occupied by ethically dubious purposes. Such design work is not limited to correctional facilities – in fact, the precise definition of what constitutes “ethical” design is necessarily debatable. However, broadly speaking, we think that as a professional organization we should not only respond to but advocate for more holistic and humane design because, as others have pointed out, our prime directive is and ought to be to make the world a better place through design. It may already be true that our profession, and by extension the AIA, operates informally under an equivalent of the Hippocratic Oath (“first, do no harm”), but this is not necessarily the case, as ADPSR’s proposal indicates.

As specific background to our Chapter’s activities, in November of 2013 our Ethics Committee facilitated a panel discussion entitled “Upholding Human Rights: The AIA Code of Ethics and Design of Certain Spaces within Correctional Facilities.” This panel was assembled partly in response to a request by local AIA advocates involved with ADPSR. ADPSR was represented by

Raphael Sperry AIA of San Francisco, who is a Soros Justice Fellow and current president of ADPSR. A number of practitioners in the correctional facilities area and other interested parties attended the panel. The discussion was robust and informative, and the panel included Elizabeth Minnis AIA, deputy commissioner, Office of Planning, Design and Construction at the Division of Capital Asset Management and Maintenance for the Commonwealth of Massachusetts; Jeffrey J. Quick AIA, director, Division of Resource Management at the Department of Correction for the Commonwealth; and Brad Walker AIA, principal at Ruhl Walker Architects and a member of the AIA National Ethics Council.

What was most remarkable about this panel and the ensuing discussion was the perceivable changing of hearts and minds in the room – there was not only broad acknowledgment of the difficulty in defining ethical behavior, but also of the complexities of correctional design and owner-architect relationships, as well as the danger of inaction or, worse, of turning a blind eye to the discomfort around these issues.

To summarize, given the BSA’s research into these issues, our assessment of how “human rights” are defined by organizations including the United Nations, our understanding of the scope and purpose of the AIA Code of Ethics with regard to the practice of architecture and US law, and considering what we learned at the BSA Ethics Committee’s deliberation after the November 5 panel, we hereby recommend that the National AIA fully support ADPSR’s proposed amendment to the Code of Ethics as follows:

**Current AIA Code of Ethics**

Canon I, General Obligations; E.S. Rule 1.4

*Human Rights: Members should uphold human rights in all their professional endeavors.*

**Proposed ADPSR modification to the Code of Ethics**

Canon I, General Obligations, new E.S. Rule 1.402

*Members shall not design spaces intended for execution or for torture or other cruel, inhumane, or degrading treatment or punishment, including prolonged solitary confinement.*

We are pleased to add our Board’s unanimous voice to this effort to raise awareness of this important issue, and by extension help to improve the collective lot for all of humanity.

Sincerely,



Emily Grandstaff-Rice AIA  
President