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New Book by Philip K. Howard Proposes Governing Framework to Address Root Causes of Alienation and Failure

“Everyday Freedom” – in the Tradition of Thomas Paine’s Common Sense – Offers a Vision to Re-Empower Americans and Unclog Government

New York, NY – January 23, 2024 – Rodin Books today published *Everyday Freedom: Designing the Framework for a Flourishing Society* by best-selling author Philip K. Howard. Howard’s policies have been endorsed by multiple U.S. Presidents.

Everyday Freedom pinpoints the source of powerlessness that is fraying American culture and causing public failure, and offers a bold vision of simpler governing frameworks to re-empower Americans in their daily choices. “Everyday Freedom shows us how to break out of the spiral of decreasing trust, confidence, and capability,” social psychologist Jonathan Haidt concludes, “and re-invigorate our institutions, our governments, and ourselves.”

Everyday Freedom diagnoses our collective futility as resulting from a deliberate change in governing philosophy: The assault on authority after the 1960s, aimed at enhancing freedom, instead created a plague of powerlessness. The teacher in the classroom, the principal in a school, the nurse in the hospital, the official in Washington, the parent on a field trip, the head of a local charity or church...all have their hands tied. Things don’t work, because Americans have lost the freedom to roll up their sleeves and take responsibility. “In this insightful book,” Nobel laureate Edmund Phelps notes, “Philip Howard shows why an economy where people can flourish requires a legal framework permitting individuals to use their judgment and initiative, and how this self-expression is a cornerstone of societal progress.”

“Legal architects in the 1960s thought that putting legal shackles on institutional authority would enhance freedom by eliminating unfair choices,” Howard observes. “But they achieved instead a paralytic system of red tape and legal demands.” As Howard explains: “Freedom only exists within a culture of standards and values that people can rely upon. If the people in charge of institutions no longer have authority to make those value judgments, nothing much gets done sensibly or fairly. The resulting vacuum is filled by self-interested people claiming rights at the expense of everyone else. Bullies take over.”

Everyday Freedom describes the new framework needed to revive America’s can-do culture: Replace the red tape tangle in Washington with “simpler frameworks more like the Constitution, which are activated by people taking responsibility.” People at every level of responsibility must be free to do what they think is sensible and fair. Law can set goals, but only humans can make sense of them. What’s needed are not new policies, but a framework of goals, principles, and clear lines of authority and accountability that are understandable to real people.

New leadership alone cannot stop the downward spiral. Washington has spawned a huge industry dedicated to the status quo, no matter who is elected, and is long overdue for a spring cleaning. What’s needed is an overhaul of historic proportions. Like other recodifications through history, this one should be proposed by an outside commission and then voted on by Congress.

Change is not impossible, Howard argues, but inevitable. The broad sense of futility has pushed America into a tailspin of alienation and extremism. A reckoning rushes toward us. Domestic discord and paralysis disrupt economic opportunity and contribute to destabilization of world order. Political parties feed off the polarization, and offer no vision to re-invigorate America’s can-do spirit.

Pulling out of America’s downward dive, Howard argues, requires replacing rote legal frameworks with simpler frameworks that allow humans taking responsibility to draw on context and values. The social trust essential for a flourishing culture, for example, requires that people with responsibility have authority to apply consistent norms of right and wrong. Otherwise, government will continue to flail for the same reason it has estranged its citizens. Its operating structure preempts the active intelligence and moral judgments of people on the ground.

Washington insiders will fiercely resist change. But nothing short of human re-empowerment can arrest public failure and alienation. Freedom without authority degenerates into a free-for-all. Democracy can’t work without real people at the helm. “This short, clear, passionate book,” Jonathan Haidt concludes, “shows how we can create an upward spiral of freedom, wisdom, and success.”

ADVANCE PRAISE FOR *EVERYDAY FREEDOM*

Everyday Freedom offers a master class in consequences of lost agency. Agency not only promotes freedom, but its deprivation through policies and regulations saps civil vitality. Politicians' inattentiveness to the problem stokes alienation and populism. Re-empowering individuals can produce a can-do, let 'er rip economy of opportunity and flourishing. We've corrected such "system failure" before, and Howard provides a roadmap for doing so again. The book is a must read for any student of what ails this society—that is, all of us.

Glenn Hubbard, Russell L. Carson Professor of Economics and Finance, Columbia University, and former Chair, White House Council of Economic Advisers

In this insightful book, Philip Howard shows why an economy where people can flourish requires a legal framework permitting individuals to use their judgment and initiative, and how this self-expression is a cornerstone of societal progress.

Edmund Phelps, recipient of the 2006 Nobel Prize in Economics, and McVickar Professor Emeritus of Political Economy and Director of the Center on Capitalism and Society, Columbia University

America is in a self-reinforcing spiral of decreasing trust, confidence, and capability. Philip Howard has been warning us about it for 15 years, and in *Everyday Freedom* he shows us how to break out of it and re-energize our institutions, our governments, and ourselves. This short, clear, passionate book shows how we can create an upward spiral of freedom, wisdom, and success.

Jonathan Haidt, Thomas Cooley Professor of Ethical Leadership, New York University—Stern School of Business, author of *The Righteous Mind*, and co-author of *The Coddling of the American Mind*

This is very much a book that needed to be written. ... [*Everyday Freedom*] is one of the books that comes closest to diagnosing what is wrong with our country.

Tyler Cowen, Holbert L. Harris Professor of Economics, George Mason University, and Co-Founder of the blog *Marginal Revolution*

Everyday Freedom is the most powerful, incisive critique of modern governance we have seen in a generation. Howard's razor-sharp analysis cuts through legal complexity to reveal a clear path to American rejuvenation: simplifying the bureaucratic maze that binds our ingenuity. This is an urgent, necessary read for all who are committed to re-empowering individuals and restoring the vibrant spirit that defines our nation.

Jennifer Brick Murtazashvili, Founding Director of the Center for Governance and Markets and Professor at the Graduate School of Public and International Affairs, University of Pittsburgh

Philip K. Howard's slim *Everyday Freedom* is a hefty addition to the literature of freedom. While debates rage over freedom of speech, Howard is concerned with freedom of *doing*. That is the freedom to use one's knowledge, experience, and intuition to act effectively in the circumstances at hand—in leading a classroom, patrolling a neighborhood, managing a business, fixing a bridge, helping a stranger. Human agency in such practical endeavors is being smothered because judges and bureaucrats are neglecting their own capacities for moral judgement. Howard recognizes that the problem is deeply embedded in modern culture. But he argues convincingly that the first, feasible step for restoring everyday freedom is for our institutions and their leaders to reassert their authority and accountability for the common good.

Christopher DeMuth, Distinguished Fellow, Simon Center for American Studies, Heritage Foundation, and former President, American Enterprise Institute

[In] *Everyday Freedom*, Howard cites the buildup since the 1960s of laws and rules that were intended to ensure procedural fairness, but in practice have chipped away at officials' authority to do their jobs. ... He offers many examples: ... To his list, I'd add larger systemic failures that leave frustrated citizens wondering whether they're stuck with a "can't do" government forever.

Will Marshall, Founder and President, Progressive Policy Institute

Philip Howard's powerful new book is a *cri de coeur* about the decay of "everyday freedom" in America. Howard shows how the rights revolution of the 1960's designed to expand individual freedom by limiting institutional authority instead ushered in a daily regime of paralyzing red tape, sign-here forms, and rigid protocols that not only waste our time, but worse, deprive us of personal agency. Teachers hesitate to hug a hurt child, doctors order batteries of tests in cases where they know they're irrelevant adding to medical costs and crowding, civil projects that should take a few months drown in a sea of agency permits. Also lost in all of this is America's legendary can-do spirit and pragmatism, not to mention citizens' personal satisfaction in "getting stuff done." If you want to understand the sense of futility and mistrust that corrodes so much of American life these days, *Everyday Freedom* is essential reading. This is an important book.

Kay Hymowitz, William E. Simon Fellow, Manhattan Institute

In *Everyday Freedom*, Philip Howard ... rightly sees that in our efforts to eliminate human bias and error we have created new self-propagating barriers to efficiency and equity. As

we stand at the brink of the Age of AI with its promises of algorithms that will replace human decision-making, this may be the most important book you read this year.

Philip Bobbitt, Herbert Wechsler Professor of Federal Jurisprudence, Columbia Law School

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