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**A New HTTP Status Code for Legally-restricted Resources**  
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Abstract

This document specifies an additional Hypertext Transfer Protocol (HTTP) status code for use when resource access is denied for legal reasons.

Status of this Memo

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## **1. Introduction**

This document specifies an additional Hypertext Transfer Protocol (HTTP) status code for use when resource access is denied for legal reasons. This allows server operators to operate with greater transparency in circumstances where issues of law or public policy affect their operation. This transparency may be beneficial both to these operators and to end users.

Feedback should occur on the [ietf-http-wg@w3.org](mailto:ietf-http-wg@w3.org) mailing list, although this draft is NOT a work item of the IETF HTTPbis Working Group.

## **2. Requirements**

The key words "MUST", "MUST NOT", "REQUIRED", "SHALL", "SHALL NOT", "SHOULD", "SHOULD NOT", "RECOMMENDED", "MAY", and "OPTIONAL" in this document are to be interpreted as described in [[RFC2119](#)].

## **3. 451 Unavailable For Legal Reasons**

This status code indicates that the server is subject to legal restrictions which prevent it servicing the request.

Since such restrictions typically apply to all operators in a legal jurisdiction, the server in question may or may not be an origin server. The restrictions typically most directly affect the operations of ISPs and search engines.

Responses using this status code SHOULD include an explanation, in the response body, of the details of the legal restriction; which legal authority is imposing it, and what class of resources it applies to. For example:



HTTP/1.1 451 Unavailable For Legal Reasons  
Content-Type: text/html

```
<html>
<head>
<title>Unavailable For Legal Reasons</title>
</head>
<body>
<h1>Unavailable For Legal Reasons</h1>
<p>This request may not be serviced in the Roman Province of
Judea due to Lex3515, the Legem Ne Subversionem Act of AUC755,
which disallows access to resources hosted on servers deemed
to be operated by the Judean Liberation Front.</p>
</body>
</html>
```

The use of the 451 status code implies neither the existence nor non-existence of the resource named in the request. That is to say, it is possible that if the legal restriction were removed, a request for the resource might still not succeed.

## **4. Security Considerations**

### **4.1. 451 Unavailable for Legal Reasons**

The 451 status code is optional; clients cannot rely upon its use. It is imaginable that certain legal authorities may wish to avoid transparency, and not only forbid access to certain resources, but also disclosure that the restriction exists.

## **5. IANA Considerations**

The HTTP Status Codes Registry should be updated with the following entries:

- o Code: 451
- o Description: Unavailable for Legal Reasons
- o Specification: [ this document ]

## **6. Normative References**

[RFC2119] Bradner, S., "Key words for use in RFCs to Indicate Requirement Levels", [BCP 14](#), [RFC 2119](#), March 1997.



## **Appendix A. Acknowledgements**

Thanks to Terence Eden, whose blog observed that the existing status code 403 was not really suitable for this situation, and suggested the creation of a new status code

Thanks also to Ray Bradbury.

The author takes all responsibility for errors and omissions.

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