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An HTTP Status Code to Report Legal Obstacles
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Abstract

This document specifies a Hypertext Transfer Protocol (HTTP) status code for use when resource access is denied due to legal demands.

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[1.](#) Introduction

This document specifies a Hypertext Transfer Protocol (HTTP) status code for use when a server operator has received a legal demand to deny access to a resource. It may be used to provide 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 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 denying access to the resource in response to a legal demand.

Since such demands typically apply to all operators in a legal jurisdiction, the server in question may not be an origin server. The demands 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 demand: the party making it, the applicable legislation or regulation, and what classes of person and resource it applies to. For example:

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

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```
<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 the Lex Julia Majestatis, which disallows
    access to resources hosted on servers deemed to be
    operated by the People's Front of Judea.</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 demands were removed, a request for the resource still might 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 possible that certain legal authorities may wish to avoid transparency, and not only demand the restriction of access to certain resources, but also avoid disclosing that the demand was made.

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, who 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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