

Commonly Used Terms in Prisons

(Hardesty & Sturges, 2006, pp. 9-12)



Administrative Custody (AC Status) — A status of confinement for non-disciplinary reasons that provides closer supervision, control and protection than is provided in general population.

Boot Camp — Highly structured, short-term prison treatment programs modeled after military basic training. These programs emphasize physical exercise, strict supervision and discipline, and are designed for young, first-time offenders.

Capital Case — An inmate physically committed to the department under a sentence of Capital Punishment (death sentence), pending sentencing under a jury recommendation for Capital Punishment, or whose sentence of Capital Punishment has been vacated, but is awaiting re-sentencing where a sentence of Capital Punishment may be re-imposed.

Care, Custody, and Control — The main mission of the correctional facility; corrections officers must maintain this at all times.

Commissary/Outside Purchases — The facility commissary is a store located inside the facility specifically for inmates. It carries a wide variety of items ranging from candy bars to televisions. This includes personal care items such as shampoo, soap, and toothpaste. Each inmate is permitted to visit once a week and may purchase up to a certain limit. All money is sent to an inmate's account online through JPay. Information about this system can be found on www.cor.state.pa.us. Items available in the commissary must be purchased from the commissary. The inmate, family, and/or friends of the inmate are permitted to purchase approved items from approved vendors on the master commissary list, with the approval of the Facility Manager/Designee. For example, if the inmate buys a television at the commissary, you can be sure that the television is the type permitted in the facility.

Commissary Items — Items that are offered for sale by the facility through the Commissary and are intended for personal use or consumption by the inmate.

Community Corrections Center (CCC) — A residential facility operated directly by the Bureau of Community Corrections to provide residential and treatment services to certain inmates selected for placement into a community setting prior to or as part of parole.

Contraband — Any item possessed by an inmate or found within the facility that is illegal by law or expressly prohibited by those legally charged with the administration and operation of the facility or program (examples may include money, cell phones, weapons, drugs, alcohol, extra un-issued razors, soda bottles/tops, etc.)

Custody Level — Refers to the degree of staff supervision and control necessary to monitor the behavior of an inmate. Custody levels range from level 1 (Community Corrections) to level 5 (maximum). Custody levels are determined after each inmate is evaluated on the Pennsylvania Additive Classification Tool (PACT), an objective, behavior-driven classification assessment based on a “just-deserts” philosophy.

Custody Level Override — A classification action that requests a custody designation and a facility placement assignment more or less restrictive than the inmate’s scored custody designation.

Department or DOC — The Pennsylvania Department of Corrections

Detainer — Refers to a request filed by a criminal justice agency with the facility in which an inmate is incarcerated, asking the facility either to hold the inmate for the agency or to notify the agency when release is imminent. Detainers are usually based on outstanding criminal charges, outstanding parole or probation violations, or additional sentences already imposed against the inmate.

Disciplinary Custody — The maximum restrictive status of confinement to which an inmate guilty of a Class 1 misconduct may be committed. Inmates shall be placed in disciplinary custody status for periods no longer than 90 days per misconduct charge.

DNA Detection of Sexual Violent Offenders Act — A state law that requires a blood sample is taken from inmates who have been convicted of certain sexual and violent offenses.

Facility Manager — The Superintendent of a State Correctional Institution or State Regional Correctional Facility, Commander of a Motivational Boot Camp, or Director of a Community Corrections Center.

Grievance — A formal written complaint by an inmate related to a problem encountered during the course of his/her confinement.

Hearing Examiner — An employee of the department’s Office of Chief Counsel, who conducts inmate misconduct hearings and who serves as an impartial party in the inmate disciplinary process for rule violations and misconducts. The Hearing Examiner reviews evidence, determines relevance of witnesses, interviews witnesses, determines guilt or innocence, and imposes sanctions consistent with department policy DC-ADM 801, “Inmate Discipline.”

Indigent Inmate — An inmate shall be deemed indigent if the combined balances of his or her facility account and any other accounts are \$10 or less at all times during the 30 days preceding the date on which the inmate submits a request to a person designated by the Facility Manager. If the inmate is physically able to work but refuses to work or has self-confined, the inmate will not be considered indigent.

Life Sentence — A court sentence for the balance of a persons’ life for conviction of first or second-degree murder. The governor can grant a minimum sentence date only after the Board of Pardons holds a public hearing and recommends commutation of the sentence.

Lock-Down — Securing a correctional facility or unit by restricting prisoner movement to their housing area.

Long-Term Segregation Unit (LTSU) — A housing unit or group of cells designated to house inmates classified as custody level 5H.

Maximum Sentence — The last day of the court sentence confinement for one or more sentences.

Minimum Sentence — A date set by court sentence for the earliest consideration for parole privileges.

Mental Health Unit — A housing area or group of cells designated for inmates confined in a facility-based mental health unit licensed by the Pennsylvania Department of Public Welfare, Office of Mental Health and Substance Abuse Services.

Misconduct — A written report completed in response to a violation of a formal rule or regulation by an inmate in the custody of the department.

Misconduct Hearing — A hearing held in the prison to determine if a misconduct report is substantiated and, if so, what discipline the inmate will receive.

Non-Contact Visit — A visit in which the inmate and the visitor are not permitted to be in physical contact and are generally separated by a physical barrier.

Parole — The granting of conditional community release of a resident by the legal authority of the Pennsylvania Board of Probation and Parole (PBPP). The action will affect the legal transfer of supervisory jurisdiction from the department to the PBPP.

Parolee — An individual who has been paroled from a state correctional facility and is under the jurisdiction of the PBPP, but who may be lacking a specific approved home plan, employment, or who requires specific treatment programming prior to being released into a private community residence.

Parole Officer — A person who supervises offenders paroled from prison. The inmate has agreed to abide by certain conditions outlined by the Board of Probation and Parole.

Pennsylvania Additive Classification Tool (PACT) — An additive classification system that is designed to be objective and behavior driven in that an inmate's custody level and control are dictated by a "just deserts" model. Classification decision making is centralized, monitored, and controlled through an automated data system by Central Office classification personnel. The system is designed to reduce over classification of an inmate resulting in the placement of the inmate in the least restrictive security level based on an objective assessment of his/her custody needs.

Reclassification — The yearly review of an inmate's current custody level, misconducts, program behavior, and escapes in order to determine a custody score and custody level.

Restitution — A special condition of a court sentence ordering the inmate to make payments to the victim of the original crime and pay a fee to the Crime Victim's Compensation Board.

Revocation — Refers to an administrative decision ending a parole because the offender violated the conditions of parole. An offender is entitled to a hearing before the Board of Probation and Parole before a decision to revoke the supervision period is made.

Restricted Housing Unit (RHU) — A special housing unit in the facility that provides a safe and secure setting for inmates placed in Disciplinary Custody for up to 90 days per misconduct charge when found guilty of Class 1 misconduct. The Restricted Housing Unit (RHU) includes Administrative Custody, a separate special non-disciplinary housing providing closer supervision, control and protection for inmates.

Special Management Unit (SMU) — Special units within designated Department of Corrections facilities designed to safely and humanely handle inmates whose behavior presents a serious threat to the safety and security of the facility, staff, other inmates, or him/herself.

Special Needs Unit (SNU) — A housing unit established to provide a safe and secure setting and specialized treatment services for those inmates identified as being unable to function in a general population housing unit. Inmates in this category may include those diagnosed as mentally ill, emotionally unstable, and physically or developmentally challenged. Placement does not require the mental health commitment process.


Special Visit — A visit by an Official Visitor, the inmate’s religious advisor, or attorney. A special visit is a visit in addition to the regular weekly visit, or an approved visitor who is not on the inmate’s visiting list.

Technical Violation — A violation of parole not involving a violation of the law.

Unit Management Team — The individuals assigned to operate a housing unit with the responsibility for security, risk management, and program delivery. The Unit Management Team may act as the Hearing Examiner and decide Class 2 misconducts in those facilities where the Secretary has specifically approved their use in this manner.

Youthful Offender — The Juvenile Act, 42 Pa. C.S.A. §6301, et seq. defines a child as an individual under the age of 18 years, is under the age of 21 years who committed an act of delinquency before reaching the age of 18 years, and/or was adjudicated dependent before reaching the age of 18 years and who, while engaged in a course of instruction or treatment, requests the court to retain jurisdiction until the course has been completed, but in no event shall a child remain in a course of instruction or treatment past the age of 21 years.

A youthful inmate under the Prison Rape Elimination Act is any person under the age of 18 who is under adult court supervision and incarcerated or detained in a prison or jail.

Zero Drug Tolerance Policy — A policy that states that NO drug possession or use will be tolerated in state prison facilities. 

SOURCE

Hardesty, K., & Sturges, J. E. (2006). *A handbook for the families and friends of Pennsylvania Department of Corrections prison inmates*. Available from the Pennsylvania Department of Corrections: http://www.cor.state.pa.us/portal/server.pt/community/departement_of_corrections/4604

National Standards to Prevent, Detect, and Respond to Prison Rape, 28 C.F.R. § 115 (2012).

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