



# PREPARATION FOR PRISON

Answers to frequently asked questions and information to help you and your family prepare for your time in prison

United States Probation Office  
Northern District of Alabama

# What is Voluntary Surrender

At sentencing, the Court often will allow a defendant to voluntarily surrender for service of their sentence.

The Court will impose the date and time the person is to voluntarily surrender at the sentencing hearing. This is usually six to eight weeks after the sentencing hearing, but can be a shorter or longer period of time.

The Court usually orders that the person may report either to the designated Bureau of Prisons (BOP) institution or to the U.S. Marshal's Office.

# Voluntary Surrender To The Bop Institution

- The BOP looks on voluntary surrender to the institution in terms of classification and designation decision.
- You will not spend time in a county jail or detention facility awaiting transport to the designated BOP facility.
- Travel to the designated facility is at your expense.

# Voluntary Surrender To The U.S. Marshals Service

- You may be delayed in a county jail or detention facility awaiting transport to the bop for up to a couple of months.
- The government bears the cost of your transport to the designated institution.
- You will be transported either by vehicle or contract carrier airline to the designated institution.

# How Do I Know Where I Will Serve my Prison Term

- You will be notified by the U.S. Marshal's service of the institution where you have been designated to serve your sentence.
- If you have not been provided your designation by the U.S. Marshal's service by one week prior to your surrender date, contact your attorney or the U.S. Marshal.



## How The BOP Determines Where I Will Be Designated

The BOP's sentence computation and designation service center in Grand Prairie, Texas, will compute your sentence and designate the institution where you will serve your sentence.

There are many factors the BOP considers in determining where you will be placed.

# Factors Considered In Designation

- The level of security and staff supervision you require
- The level of security and staff supervision the institution can provide
- Level of medical care needed
- Program needs, such as, education, vocational training, mental health treatment, substance abuse treatment
- Institutional bed space
- Release plans
- Judicial recommendations
- Separation needs (from co-defendants or related cases)
- Any other security measures to ensure safety of victims, witnesses, and general public

# Primary Factors In Determining Security Level

- Whether You Have Detainers Or Holds
- Severity Of The Current Offense
- Severity Of Your Prior Criminal History
- History Of Escape/Escape Attempts
- History Of Violence
- Whether You Voluntarily Surrender
- Age
- Educational Level
- Alcohol/Drug Abuse History

# How Will My Sentence be Calculated

## The Sentencing Court Determines:

- 1) the length of your sentence
- 2) how it runs in relation to other sentences

## The Bop Determines:

- 1) when the sentence begins
- 2) prior custody credit
- 3) projected good conduct time
- 4) projected release date

# How Will My Sentence Run In Relation To Any Other Sentence(s)

**Concurrent** = The Sentences Run At The Same Time Together

**Consecutive** = One Sentence Follows Another

Most Sentences Imposed At The Same Time Run Concurrently Unless The Maximum Sentence For One Offense Is Shorter Than The Sentencing Guidelines Require.

Most Sentences Imposed At Different Times Run Consecutively Unless The Court Specifically Orders Them To Run Concurrently.

The Law Requires That Sentences For Certain Offenses Must Run Consecutively To Any Other Sentence.

# When Will My Sentence Begin

On the date you are received into BOP custody or you are awaiting transportation to the BOP facility where you will serve your sentence

- or -

On the date you voluntarily surrender to the BOP institution where you are designated or to the U.S. Marshals office

# Prior Custody Credit

Prior credit is awarded for any time spent in detention or jail that:

was served as a result of the offense for which the sentence in this case was imposed

- or -

as a result of any other charge for which you were arrested after the commission of the offense for which this sentence was imposed

- but -

the time must not have been credited against any other sentence.

# Good Conduct Time

A person serving more than one year in custody is eligible to receive good conduct time.

Good conduct time is awarded for compliance with rules and regulations and is awarded by the BOP at their discretion.

You can earn up to 54 days for each 12 months served. If your final year is less than 12 months, the credit will be prorated.



# Preparation For You and Your Family

# Take Care Of Medical Issues

- ❑ See your doctor for a check-up if possible. Obtain current prescriptions for all medications and/or necessary medical equipment, i.e. prosthetic devices, C-PAP machines, eye glasses, contacts, etc.
- ❑ If you have a chronic medical condition or a recent medical problem, try to see your doctor to have treatment, surgery, etc. performed prior to surrendering to serve your sentence or to prepare for continuing treatment of the condition while you are in custody.
- ❑ Make an appointment with your dentist and have a dental exam, cleaning, and any necessary dental work performed in advance.

# Prepare Legal Documents

- ❑ Make sure your driver's license is current before you surrender.
- ❑ Locate and safely store important identification and legal documents where you can be confident you will be able to locate them upon your release. This should include your birth certificate, social security card, driver's license, marriage license, title to your car, deed to any property you own, etc.
- ❑ Depending on your personal circumstances, consider whether or not you might want to draft a will. If so, you might consult an attorney or research this yourself.
- ❑ If you are the sole account holder on any bank or financial accounts, consider whether or not you would want to have another person become a signatory on that account to be able to access those funds.

# Powers Of Attorney

- If there is a possibility that you would want your parent, spouse, or significant other to be able to handle the purchase or sale of any property in your name or act on your behalf regarding business or legal matters, contact an attorney or research whether or not you might want to sign a power of attorney for that person to legally be able to transact that type of business on your behalf.
- Be aware that there are different types of power of attorney which are for different purposes and varying levels of “power.”

# Pending Charges and Outstanding Warrants

- ❑ If you have a pending municipal or state court case, make sure that the court and your attorney are aware that you will be in custody. This may prevent a warrant being issued for your arrest due to a missed court appearance.
- ❑ If you have an outstanding warrant for municipal or state charges, do everything you can to address the warrant BEFORE you surrender.

Inmates with outstanding warrants are NOT ELIGIBLE for placement at the residential reentry center (halfway house) prior to their release.

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- ❑ If you owe court-ordered costs, fines, or restitution in any other case, try to pay the balance in full. If you are unable to do so, inform the court of your surrender date. This may prevent a warrant from being issued for your arrest due to non-payment while you are in custody.
  - ❑ If you are serving a probation or parole sentence with any municipality or the state, inform your probation officer of your surrender date and the length of your sentence so that a warrant will not be issued for your arrest for non-reporting, non-payment, etc.

# Care Of Your Children, Parents, And Spouse

Depending upon your personal situation, you may have family members or pets dependent upon you for their care. It is extremely important to begin planning now for the impact your absence will have on their lives.

Enlist the help of parents, siblings, spouses, other relatives, and possibly friends or neighbors to assist with the care of your children, elderly parents, or disabled relatives under your care whenever possible.

If you do not have any viable options for the care of your minor children, other dependents, or elderly parents during your incarceration, discuss this with your probation officer as early as possible. We will work with you to access community resources to ensure that their needs are met.

# Financial Planning

Begin planning AS SOON AS POSSIBLE for the impact your being in custody will have on your financial situation.

1. If you own your home, but have a mortgage, consider whether you will be able to continue paying the mortgage payments during the time you are in custody. Determine whether refinancing your mortgage to lower payments, using other assets to maintain the payments, leasing the property, or selling the property might be in your best interest.
2. If you rent an apartment or home, consider when the lease is due to expire, whether renewing the lease should be done prior to your surrender date, whether leasing a different place would provide a better option for your family, or whether it might be less expensive to store your personal property during your incarceration.

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3. If you own a car which still has an outstanding loan, consider the balance of your loan, the value of the car, the monthly payment amount, the length of time you will be in custody, and your family's transportation needs to determine the best option for you regarding keeping or selling the vehicle.
  4. If you have other assets, such as rental property, land, boats, motorcycles, or motorhomes, consider these as well.
  5. In your evaluation of financial matters, consider the long-term consequences of your choices, BUT maintain a focus on what will be reasonable for your family or others to handle and maintain in your absence. Do everything you can to ease the financial burden on your family.
  6. Don't forget to consider that you will also need some money to take care of your basic needs while in custody. This amount is limited, and may vary between institutions.



7. If you were ordered to pay a fine or restitution, you might want to assess whether you have the ability to pay these before you surrender or not.
8. Recognize that you will be required to make payments while you are in custody and after your release from custody until the balance is paid in full.
9. If you receive SSI benefits (based on wages) from the Social Security Administration, your benefits will be suspended if you are in custody for more than 30 continuous days for a criminal offense. Benefits can be reinstated the month following your release. If you are imprisoned for 12 or more consecutive months, your eligibility will expire, and you will have to re-apply for benefits upon your release.

# Make The Most Of Your Time In Custody

- ▶ The more that you can do while you are in custody to address court-imposed conditions before your release, the easier your supervision will be upon your release. For example, if you were ordered to obtain your GED, try to earn it while you are in custody.
- ▶ Use your time in custody to access treatment that would not be available to you as easily or for free in the community – mental health, substance abuse, domestic violence, anger management, parenting.
- ▶ Consider what classes or treatment are available to you to help you become a stronger person, more knowledgeable in the community, a better parent, a more responsible citizen, and to assist you in making changes you want to make or that you know you need to make.
- ▶ Improve your education and your employability through GED classes, online college courses, and vocational training offered in prison. There may be costs to you associated with some of these.

# PREPARATION FOR YOUR RELEASE

- ❑ Ensure that you know where your identification documents are.
- ❑ Be prepared to renew your driver's license as soon as possible upon your release.
- ❑ If you received SSI benefits prior to your imprisonment, notify your case manager. If your institution has a pre-release agreement with a local SSA office, they might be able to assist in expediting the re-application process. However, your benefits will not be reinstated until you are actually released, contact the SSA, and provide release documents.
- ❑ Begin thinking now about where you will live and work upon your release.



- ❑ Recognize that your family will have to make adjustments to meet their needs while you are in custody. Allow them to do that without pressure or repercussions from you.
- ❑ Understand that there will be some stress placed on your family both while you are gone and upon your return. They may experience mixed emotions. Give them the emotional and physical space and time to work through them.
- ❑ You also need to give yourself time and space to adjust. If you and/or your family continues to have a difficult time, let your probation officer know.

# Helping Your Children Through This Process

Research shows that children can experience stress and trauma as a result of their parent going to prison.

- Talking with your children honestly about your custody, allowing them to express their feelings, and encouraging them to seek comfort and help is in their best interest and will reduce their anxiety and stress. (as age appropriate)
- If your child does experience anxiety or depression or exhibits symptoms that suggest they are struggling while you are incarcerated, it is important that help for them be obtained through a school counselor, a pastor, or a professional counselor.

# Keep Your Focus On The Future

- When you are preparing to go to prison, it is easy to feel like your life is ending or over. Remember that this is only a phase or period of your life – not your whole life.
- You are at what most offenders describe as the most difficult part of the criminal justice process – fear of the unknown, uncertainty about your future, worry about your family.
- Try to maintain a long-term focus. Picture yourself when you get out of prison. Plan for what you want your life to be like. Be realistic, but set goals and take steps to meet them.
- If you feel that you are unable to do this, please talk with your probation officer, your lawyer, and/or your minister about this. We can help you through this difficult process.

# Resources For You

- ❖ United States Bureau of Prisons
  - ❖ [www.bop.gov](http://www.bop.gov)
- ❖ The National Resource Center on Children and Families of the Incarcerated
  - ❖ [www.fcnetwork.org](http://www.fcnetwork.org)
- ❖ Alabama Department of Human Resources
  - ❖ [www.dhr.state.al.us](http://www.dhr.state.al.us)