

# Understanding NC's Prison System

## **OVERVIEW**

The North Carolina Division of Prisons is the division of the North Carolina Department of Correction responsible for the housing, supervision, treatment, and welfare of persons committed by the courts to serve active prison sentences. The Division's top priority is to ensure the safety of the general public while providing each offender with the resources necessary to assist in reducing the offender's desire to take part in future criminal behavior.

## **ASSIGNING INMATES TO PRISON**

Many people believe that prisons are basically the same in structure, scope and purpose. However, correctional facilities within the NC Division of Prisons are classified with different security levels consisting of close, medium, and minimum security. Upon admission, each inmate undergoes an extensive assessment, which considers factors ranging from security requirements to the inmate's need to participate in certain corrective programs. Newly admitted inmates are transported from county jails to one of ten (10) prison diagnostic centers where the assessment process begins. There are two reception centers for females, two for male youth, and six for adult males. Upon admission, each inmate is put through a series of evaluations, including medical and mental health screenings. Prison staff develop an individual profile of each inmate that includes his/her crime, social background, education, job skills and work history, health, and criminal record including prior prison sentences. Based on this information, the offender is assigned to the most appropriate custody classification and prison facility. Each inmate's progress is reviewed on a regular basis by prison staff to ensure appropriate classification and assignment.

## **INMATE CUSTODY**

Inmates may be classified and assigned to the following custodial levels: close, medium, minimum I, minimum II, or minimum III. The classification levels are in descending order of perceived public safety risk presented by the inmate. Inmates in close custody present the highest risk while inmates in minimum III generally present the least risk. Within this mix of custodial assignments, inmates also may be subject to various control statuses. The control statuses include maximum, death row, intensive, safekeeper (inmates who have not yet been sentenced but need to be housed outside of their county jail generally due to safety or security concerns), disciplinary, administrative, and protective custody. Each of these control statuses further restricts inmate freedoms and privileges. Assignment and removal of inmates from these statuses is generally at the discretion of higher level classification authorities in DOP. The imposition of these additional custody control measures are generally for the purpose of maintaining order in the prison, protecting staff safety, or providing for inmate safety.

## **PRISON SECURITY**

Prisons are classified by security level. The security levels used by the Division of Prisons are close, medium, and minimum. The prison security level is an indicator of the degree to which an offender is separated from the public.

*Close Security* – Close custody facilities typically include single cells divided into cellblocks. Cell doors are generally remote controlled from a secure control station operated by a correctional officer. The perimeter of the facility consists of a double fence and watchtowers staffed by armed correctional staff 24 hours a day. Close security facilities may also use armed correctional officers to travel the facility's perimeter during the day and/or night. Inmate movement within the facility is restricted and supervised by correctional staff. Inmates are allowed out of their cells to work or attend corrective programs inside the facilities.

*Medium Security* – Medium custody facilities are usually made up of secure dormitories that provide housing for up to fifty inmates each. Inmates sleep in a military style double bunk and have a metal locker nearby to store uniforms and approved personal items. Each dormitory is locked at night with a correctional officer providing direct supervision of the inmates and sleeping area. The perimeter of the facility consists of a double fence and watchtowers staffed by armed correctional staff. One may also notice armed correctional staff who travel the perimeter throughout the day and night. Generally, there is less supervision and control over the internal movement of inmates than in close security facilities. Most inmates housed in medium security work and/or participate in educational programs. Selected medium custody inmates are assigned to work details outside of the facility under armed supervision of trained correctional staff. These inmates support prison work farm operations, inmate construction, and highway maintenance for the Department of Transportation. Each medium security prison typically has a single cell unit for isolation of inmates who violate prison rules.

*Minimum Security* – Minimum security facilities are usually made up of dormitories that are patrolled by correctional officers. Each minimum security facility generally has a single perimeter fence, which is inspected on a regular basis, but has no

armed watchtowers or roving patrols. While Inmates assigned to minimum security facilities generally pose the least risk to public safety, security at each minimum custody facility continues to be of utmost importance as with all facilities within the NC Division of Prisons. Minimum custody inmates participate in community based work assignments such as the Governor's Community Work Program, road maintenance with Department of Transportation employee supervision, or work release with civilian employers. Minimum custody inmates also participate in pre-release programs with community volunteers and family sponsors.

### **FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS**

#### ***❖ If I am listed to receive notification, what events will I be informed about?***

In North Carolina, victims of crime have the right to receive certain information about an offender while he/she is serving an active prison term. If you are listed for notification, it is important that you inform the Department of any changes to your address and/or telephone number. Without this information, the Department will be unable to inform you of changes in the inmate's status. Below are the notifications that you can expect to receive once you have been listed for notification:

- (1) The projected date by which the defendant can be released from custody. The calculation of the release date shall be as exact as possible, including earned time and disciplinary credits if the sentence of imprisonment exceeds 90 days.
- (2) An inmate's (initial) assignment to a minimum custody unit and the address of the unit. This notification shall include notice that the inmate's minimum custody status may lead to the inmate's participation in one or more community-based programs such as work release or supervised leaves in the community.
- (3) The victim's right to submit any concerns to the agency with custody and the procedure for submitting such concerns.
- (4) The defendant's escape from custody, within 72 hours, except that if a victim has notified the agency in writing that the defendant has issued a specific threat against the victim, the agency shall notify the victim as soon as possible and within 24 hours at the latest.
- (5) The defendant's capture, within 24 hours.
- (6) The date the defendant is scheduled to be released from the facility. Whenever practical, notice shall be given 60 days before release. In no event shall notice be given less than seven days before release.
- (7) The defendant's death.

**To receive a notification form, please contact the Office of Victim Services at 1-866-719-0108 (toll-free)**

#### ***❖ What can I do if an inmate is harassing me by telephone calls or through the mail?***

If an inmate is harassing you by mail, telephone or by a third person, contact the Office of Victim Services at 1-866-719-0108 (toll free). If you have received unwanted mail, please try to save the letter and the envelope that it was sent in. Having these items helps prison staff as they work to stop the unwanted contact.

#### ***❖ What if the inmate is located in the county that I work or reside?***

If an inmate is located in the county that the victim or next of kin is employed or resides and if the victim or next of kin has a safety concern, they should contact the Office of Victim Services at 1-866-719-0108 (toll free).