

CONNECTING AND COMMUNICATING WITH PEOPLE INSIDE WASHINGTON'S PRISONS

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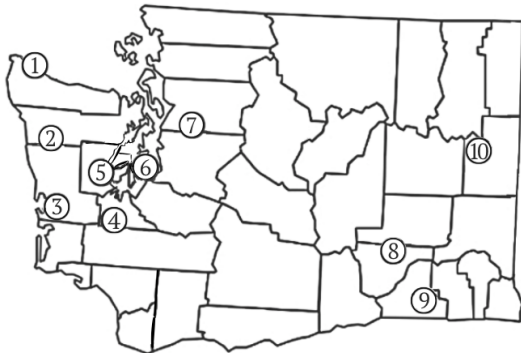


⇒ For a recording of the event on October 22, 2022 at Pipsqueak Gallery, where this info was shared, please visit bit.ly/NoPrisonsConnectVid (~30 minutes).

⇒ For more resources and an invite to support currently or formerly incarcerated comrades, please visit bit.ly/NoPrisonsLibrary.

WA STATE DEPARTMENT OF CORRECTIONS LOCATIONS

Note: CC is an initialism for Corrections Center. So-called Washington has many more sites of incarceration that are not DOC facilities.



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| ① Clallam Bay CC | ⑦ Monroe Correctional Complex |
| ② Olympic CC, Forks | ⑧ Coyote Ridge CC, Connell |
| ③ Stafford Creek CC, Aberdeen | ⑨ Washington State Penitentiary, Walla Walla |
| ④ Cedar Creek CC, Littlerock | ⑩ Airway Heights CC |
| ⑤ Washington CC (WCC), Shelton | |
| ⑥ Washington CC for Women (WCCW), Gig Harbor | |

GENERAL RULES

- ⇒ The Department of Corrections (DOC) has arbitrarily applied rules around volunteering and communicating with folks inside. It may mean you won't be allowed to volunteer at any location if you connect with folks inside.
 - ▷ If you want to both volunteer and connect with folks inside via letters, etc., consider using an account with a different name, or sharing one with others who don't volunteer.
- ⇒ To connect you'll need someone's six digit DOC number and/or their legal name and facility.
- ⇒ All communications are or may be monitored; be mindful. Anything explicit is censored and may result in an infraction for your inside pal.
- ⇒ You can only send official packages or money to one person on the inside at a time.
 - ▷ You will have to wait 90 days between transactions to different people.
 - ▷ If you send funds or official packages too soon, the person inside won't receive them and may have to pay to send them back.
- ⇒ Washington DOC has rules about what can be in physical letters, how they are addressed, etc.
 - ▷ bit.ly/MailPolicyWaDOC
- ⇒ You can still send regular-through-USPS letters and new books directly from approved vendors to multiple people. Used books are not allowed. Facility's approved vendors may differ; check with your pal or on the DOC's website.
 - ▷ Estelita's Library and several other local booksellers can send to some facilities.
 - ▷ MassiveBookshop.com sends books to folks inside at no cost. Books to Prisoners, a local nonprofit, sends books all over the US.
 - ▷ B&N and major retailers are often approved.

E-MESSAGING SYSTEMS

- ⇒ In 2022, facilities started transferring from JPay to Securus.
 - ▷ Non-DOC facilities in WA use a mix of the JPay and Securus platforms, which are owned by the same company.
- ⇒ Used for multiple functions including emailing, sending money, phone calls, and video visits.
 - ▷ Fees are charged on every transaction.
 - ▷ Higher dollar amounts have higher fees. Multiple transactions may be cost-effective.
- ⇒ Add contacts by their name and location.

- ⇒ Access for inside folks is either through individual tablets or kiosks in common spaces.
 - Tablets allow limited access to slow, limited internet. Games, music, etc. can be bought and added to the tablet.
- ⇒ Stamps are needed to send messages and attachments. Stamps cost \$10 + fees for 60.
 - You can buy stamps for folks inside.

SECURUS

- ⇒ Set up new account at: securustech.online/#/login
- ⇒ Once you login, the screen looks a bit like this:

PHONE CALLS

- ⇒ Inside folks can call you, you cannot call them.
 - Calls last 30 minutes. If there's not a line for the phones or their tablet is working, your pal can call again to continue your chat.
- ⇒ Funds can be added to your pal's account and/ or your own, so pals don't pay to call you.

VIDEO CALLS

- ⇒ Apply to be on your pal's video list through DOC. Approval may take one to two months.
 - Next, apply on Securus where a request is sent to their facility. An approval response may take two days.
- ⇒ Once on your pal's list, there are set times to schedule visits, which must be paid in advance.

ADDING FUNDS

- ⇒ If trying to add funds to a comrade's account thru "Securus Debit," even by phone, your card will decline. Instead, create a MoneyGram.com account. An additional \$4.99 fee will be charged.
 - Go to "Pay Bills" at the top of the webpage.
 - For "Biller Name" search "Securus" or enter "Securus Phone Accounts (9819) 14651 Dallas Pkwy 6th Floor, Dallas."
 - For "Biller Account Number" enter their DOC number. "Message Field 1" – their name and facility – is optional.
- ⇒ Buying stamps and other transaction types *should* work through Securus' site.
- ⇒ The user experience on these websites are designed so that people will give up; don't!

SENDING PACKAGES

- ⇒ Packages must be sent via Union Supply Direct.
 - Set up your account at: www.wainmatepackage.com/Home.aspx
- ⇒ There is a DOC-approved selection of food and other items on the vendor website and folks inside receive a catalog of available items.
- ⇒ Folks can usually receive one package a month; food packages can only be every other month.
 - Packages are limited to a certain weight.
 - Rules differ between facilities.
- ⇒ There are certain months-long wait times for both when you can send packages to a current pal and if sending a package to a new pal. You must wait 90 days between sending packages to different people.
- ⇒ Like everything in a prison, the prices are high.
 - Prisons are scams as is the racket of prison vendors.

IN-PERSON VISITS

- ⇒ Apply to be your pal's visitor at: bit.ly/VisitorFormsWaDOC
 - Approval or denial typically takes one to two months. In most cases, you're only allowed to be on one person's visitor list.
 - Applications can be denied because of previously volunteering at a DOC facility, some criminal records, etc.
- ⇒ Each facility has its own visit schedule listed on WA DOC's website.
- ⇒ They won't let you visit if you're not wearing the "right" clothes, e.g. no ripped jeans.

COMMUNICATION SKILLS

- ⇒ Relationships on the inside and outside have similarities and differences. Not everyone will be friends. There are also fabulous, beautiful people who we can connect with deeply.
- ⇒ As in all relationships, it's important to set boundaries.
- ⇒ Relationships with people inside span a spectrum. Some folks may chat about fun stuff once in a while, some collaborate on art or read books together, some send photos of themselves and talk on the phone frequently, or a combination of these.
- ⇒ Start with only one penpal so you know how much time and effort is required.
- ⇒ Please be upfront about both how often you can communicate and what formats you will use: such as phone, e-message, physical letters, contacting third-parties, etc. It's important to avoid contributing to issues of abandonment.
 - Tell them if you cannot write for a while.
- ⇒ Communicate as early as possible what type of relationship (platonic, romantic, sexual, etc.) you are seeking and update folks if this changes.
 - As a formerly incarcerated penpal put simply: "Let them know exactly what you want," in terms of writing frequency, level of contact, nature of relationship, etc.
- ⇒ In prison, sexuality is stripped from most everyone and can become embedded with violence. Prisons are designed to deny love to folks inside and their communities. Many people are searching for a healthy place to express their sexual or romantic identities.
- ⇒ Many types of relationships are cool! Just be clear about your boundaries.
- ⇒ Some folks inside may have few outside contacts or even just you. This dynamic may affect how your relationship is prioritized.
- ⇒ These relationships may be outside comfort zones and a chance to grow in abolitionist praxis, but you don't need to tolerate harm.
- ⇒ Be mindful of societal systems of oppression, personal experiences with trauma, and each other's intersectional power differentials.
 - Avoid assuming how others identify.
- ⇒ Respect what your inside connection tells you. State surveillance means there could be more publicly available information about your penpal than there is about you; that doesn't mean you should access it.
 - Another issue is that the DOC restricts how much information folks inside can access.
- ⇒ As a formerly incarcerated penpal reminds us, "boundaries apply on both sides."
- ⇒ Respect someone's stated boundaries. That could look like not writing about certain things, not naming pronouns or queerness until your connection specifically tells you, respecting the privacy of their history, etc.
- ⇒ If you break a boundary/expectation, do your best to apologize and make amends. No one is perfect. Address and reduce the harm; don't be stifled by guilt.
- ⇒ If a relationship needs to end, communicate that. This may include asking others for help.

PENPAL + OTHER RESOURCES

- ⇒ [Black & Pink Seattle-Tacoma](#) chapter educates, organizes, and builds penpal relationships of support and solidarity between the imprisoned and free members of our 2SLGBTQIA+ family.
 - The communication skills and boundaries info is mostly adapted from a [B&P Sea-Tac guide](#).
- ⇒ Survived & Punished has a helpful resource page: bit.ly/LetterWritingCenter
- ⇒ Article (≈ 6-min read) on the value of inside correspondence for abolition with links to more organizations: bit.ly/InsidePenpalEssay
- ⇒ Beyond Prisons podcast has a 90-minute episode on Why Physical Mail in Prison Matters: bit.ly/BeyondPrisonsMail

LET'S TEAR DOWN PRISON WALLS ONE LETTER AT A TIME!