

A Reporter's Glossary of Prison Jargon

Prisons are communities rife with code, shorthand and jargon intended to save time, conceal meaning from correctional officers (COs) or convey a dense amount of information. Many of the words also assume a lot of knowledge about the way prisons work, which may not be evident to an outsider.

While there are many online resources that explain prison jargon, PJP created this glossary mainly for journalists and newsrooms, who may come across these words in their reporting or in books and articles by incarcerated writers. We made every effort to provide clear definitions, so you can incorporate them into your own articles.

Prison patois is a language with rich expressions and subtle nuances, but we focused on words that we thought would most likely be relevant for mainstream journalists working with incarcerated people (for example, words related to sex could fill multiple chapters in a book, but we decided against including most of them).

The following glossary was compiled by 17 incarcerated and formerly-incarcerated writers and contributors in 11 states across the country (named credit can be found at the bottom) and edited by PJP editors. We believe it is the first of its kind to be put together by such a diverse group.

We know this is not a complete guide, nor is it meant to be. This is a living document of words that we either have come across in our writers' work or those that our writers said they used most often. Some definitions or examples of usage may differ from the standard definition of the word. We also did our best to include notations for words or definitions that might be specific to a prison or state.

This version is current as of April 2022 and is available to you under [our republication policy](#).

PRISON BASICS

CALPIA (or PIA): California Prison Industry Authority, a program in California that employs incarcerated people to produce more than 1,400 goods and services including office furniture, clothing, food and other goods to sell to state agencies.

CDV: Conduct Violation in Missouri.

CELL FEED: When the institution is on a **MODIFIED PROGRAM** and has meals brought to your cell rather than you going to **CHOW HALL**.

C-FILE: The collective file kept on incarcerated people.

CHECK IN: When an incarcerated person requests **PROTECTIVE CUSTODY (PC)**.

CHRONO: An informational notation in your official file that can be good or bad. Used in California.

CO: Corrections or correctional officer, sometimes also referred to as **OFFICER** or **PO PO**. If one calls an officer by a higher title like sergeant, it's a compliment. One can also call a sergeant or a lieutenant an officer as an insult.

COMMUNITY CORRECTIONS: A community-based program outside of prison that is often an intermediary step to re-entry. The most common are probation and parole, but they can also include work release, study release, furloughs and halfway houses.

COUNT: **COs** count the prison population four times a day (usually at 5:30, 15:30, 21:30 and 1:30). A person who is not inside their cells during **COUNT** because they have permission to be elsewhere such as the kitchen or hospital or in education class **OUTCOUNTS**. Usage example: I have to **OUTCOUNT** today for work. Also referred to as **BAGGED AND TAGGED**.

DUCAT: An appointment slip and movement authorization allowing a prisoner to move around the prison without escort. Ducats in California state prisons are pink. Use example: "I've got a 6 a.m. ducat," as justification for being on the yard and on their way to mess hall for two lunches.

EOP: Enhanced Outpatient Program. A mental health intervention outpatient program in prisons.

FACILITY: Synonymous with prison. In some locations, it is seen as a euphemism.

FAMILY VISIT: Overnight visits with a family member or a legally married partner.

FOG LINE: When the fog covers a gun tower in the institution and everyone has to go back to their cells for **COUNT**. Specifically used at San Quentin State Prison in California.

FREE STAFF: Prison staff who are not incarcerated.

GOOD TIME CREDIT: A sentence reduction given to people for good behavior while incarcerated. Also referred to as **GOOD TIME** or **TIME OFF FOR GOOD BEHAVIOR**.

HSR: Refers to the health service request form in Missouri when requesting medical, dental or mental health care.

INMATE ADVISORY COUNCIL (IAC): The council has four representatives per housing unit, each representing the Black, White, Latino and Other communities. They report to yard chair and act as liaisons with the housing staff, yard captain and prison administration. They also act as advocates for the population's needs. IAC is California's name, but many states have similar representative groups. Also see **MAC REP**.

INVESTIGATIVE SERVICES UNIT (ISU): They are essentially the police within prison. They investigate the misdeeds of those inside. In California, they are dressed in black uniforms and walk around with dogs. Also referred to as the **GOON SQUAD** or **GOONER**.

IAC: Inmate Advisory Council. In California, it typically has four representatives per housing unit (Black, White, Hispanic, Other). They report to a yard chair who reports to an executive body. They act as liaisons with the housing staff, yard captain and administration to advocate for the needs of the inmate population.

ICC: Institutional Classification Committee. This committee consists of a captain, counselor, counselor's supervisor and sometimes the warden, and it meets prisoners upon arrival at a new institution. It also conducts an annual review at which time the committee can reduce or increase security level points, transfer the individual to a lower or higher-level prison, and change the custody level higher or lower depending on the past year's behavior.

JAIL: Where you go after being arrested while you await sentencing. Jails are intended to provide housing for a limited term and do not have the kind of programs and services that prisons do. However, in many locations, people end up spending years there.

KITE: A message or a letter. A handwritten note that could be for staff or other incarcerated individuals. In the latter case, it might be written in code on a small piece of paper from the wrapper of a bar of soap shuttled between cells. **TO STRIKE UP** means to put something in writing. Usage example: "Strike up a kite with your digits."

LEVEL: Often refers to security level or a **GOOD TIME** earning level.

MAC: Men's Advisory Council, a committee of incarcerated representatives in California prisons. They are conduits for communicating between the incarcerated population and the prison administration. The committee is seen as a warden's committee, and those serving on it are viewed as working for the administration. The acronym **MAC** has been referred to within the incarcerated population as Men Against Crime.

MAIL CALL: When mail is passed out. Procedures vary by state and by prison. A person's name may be called from a podium or an officer may walk the tier and call their name in front of their cell. Mail is important and seen as an acknowledgement that a person has not been forgotten.

MAIN LINE: General prison population. In some locations, it's used to describe the mass movement to chow hall for a meal.

MAN DOWN: A call for emergency from incarcerated people.

MODIFIED PROGRAM: When the daily program is changed due to safety and security issues or medical quarantines. Could also be a result of reduced staffing.

PILL CALL: The distribution of medication, such as insulin, psychiatric medication and other prescription medicine. In California, it takes place three times a day.

PROGRAM: The word program usually refers to the activity schedule of the day, but it can also refer to rehabilitative programs such as group therapies, counseling and reentry preparation programs. A program can vary from facility to facility and prison to prison. One example: 7 a.m. breakfast; 8 a.m. work line; 9 a.m. yard, dayroom, phone calls, showers; 11:30 a.m. recall of yard, dayroom, phone calls, showers; 12:30 p.m. – 2 p.m. repeat of morning; 2:30 p.m. – 3:45 p.m. repeat, 6 p.m. – 7:45 pm. same as above.

PROGRAMMING: A broad term used in both the prison system, as well as in the reentry phase of incarceration, **PROGRAMMING** refers to the programs that incarcerated people are required to take that

are designed to aid with their rehabilitation. These programs have names like "Thinking for a Change," "Focusing on the Victim," and "Anger Management." It can also be a general term that refers to people who are willing to participate in programs and obey the prison rules. If you're **PROGRAMMING**, then you might be viewed as the equivalent of a monk who took a vow of poverty.

PROTECTIVE CUSTODY (PC): A type of solitary imprisonment to protect a person from harm from other prisoners. They could be former law enforcement officers, those with a history of being physically assaulted, those who have committed violent or sexual crimes against women or children, informants, gang members or those who are gay or transgender. Usage example: "He requested to **PC**." Also referred to as **HIT THE GATE**.

R&R: Short for Reception and Release. This is where incarcerated people are processed in or out of prison or jail.

RECALL: An announcement to call prisoners back to their housing blocks.

SECURITY LEVELS: See standalone category.

SECURITY LEVEL POINTS: A scoring system to classify incarcerated people based on factors such as their criminal history, time remaining on their sentence, age and disciplinary history. This can determine where they are housed and what classes and opportunities they might be eligible for. In some states, low points might mean receiving a gate pass so they can work off grounds.

SHIP: To transfer prisons. Sometimes referred to as SHIP OUT.

TRIPLE C: Correctional Clinical Case Management System (CCCMS). Refers to mental health services in California prisons. A **TRIPLE C** (or **TRIPLE CMS**) can also refer to a mental health patient. Use example: "Don't sit with that Triple C."

UNIT: In Texas, prisons are referred to as units. In California, it can refer to a housing block within a prison, containing up to 256 people.

UNLOCK: The scheduled times when cell doors will be unlocked to allow people to exit or enter their cells.

WRITE UP: Disciplinary report. A report for an infraction of any rule or regulation.

PRISON SECURITY LEVELS

Prisons have different security levels, and the classification can be different depending on the state or type of prison. The following is a basic explanation:

FEDERAL PRISONS

Minimum Security: These facilities tend to house those who committed nonviolent offenses. They have little to no perimeter fencing, and they are housed in dorm-style units. Sometimes called Federal Prison Camps (FPC).

Low Security: These tend to have higher perimeter fencing and a higher staff to incarcerated ratio than minimum security facilities.

Medium Security: Housing is cell-based and people there are more likely to have committed violent crimes. Fencing might have razor wires and electronic detection systems. Federal Correctional Institutions (FCIs) fall into this category.

High Security: These facilities provide the highest level of security and people are closely monitored by guards and cameras. U.S. Penitentiaries (USPs) fall into this category.

Administrative: These prisons are designed to house people with special considerations such as the chronically ill, extremely dangerous or deemed to be at high-escape risk. This includes the Administrative Maximum Security Penitentiary (ADMAX) in Florence, Colo., which is the nation's only "supermax" prison.

STATE PRISONS: State prisons have similar classifications with slight differences in nuances. In Massachusetts, prisons are classified as Pre-Release, Minimum, Medium and Maximum. California uses a number system: Level I facilities and camps are open dormitories with low security perimeters while Level IVs are maximum security facilities.

PROGRESSIVE PROGRAMMING FACILITY (PPF): This is a designation in California for prisons where individuals are held to a strict standard and expected to actively participate in available programming options, which may include parenting classes, self-help groups, recreational activities and other activity groups in a wide range of interests. PPFs require "a voluntary, self-initiated, written commitment from each participant that acknowledges a desire to conform to a strict criterion of required behaviors."

PRISON SENTENCES AND PAROLE

BOARD: A reference to the Board of Parole Hearings, which determine parole suitability.

DE FACTO LWOP: Any sentence with a parole date beyond the individual's life expectancy.

EPRO: Earliest possible release date.

LWOP: Reference to a sentence of life without parole or a person with an LWOP sentence. This is often handed down as an alternative to the death penalty. The only chance of release for LWOPs is a commutation (although some states like California provide exceptions for those who were under 18 when they were convicted).

PAROLE BOARD: Board of Parole Hearings (BPH). Referred to by the incarcerated sometimes as **BOARD**.

STRIKERS: Anyone sentenced under California's Three Strikes Law.

YPED: Youth Parole Eligibility Date. This is an early parole eligibility date given to individuals who were convicted at age 25 or younger, except those convicted under the state's Three Strikes Law and those given the death penalty. Those who received a life sentence without parole at under age 18 are also

eligible. See California Department of Corrections and Rehabilitation's [page on youth offender parole hearings](#) for more information.

PRISON LOCATIONS AND RELATED WORDS

ADSEG: Short for administrative segregation. AdSeg is a building where people are sent away from the general population for disciplinary and non-disciplinary reasons. It also includes death row. Synonymous with **ADMINISTRATIVE SEGREGATION, THE BACK, THE BOX, HOLE, SOLITARY CONFINEMENT, SHU, SLAM.**

THE BACK: Synonymous with **ADMINISTRATIVE SEGREGATION, THE BOX, HOLE, SOLITARY CONFINEMENT, SHU, SLAM.**

BACK WALL: A semi-private location in prisons to settle a dispute, usually without weapons. Example: "Take it to the back wall, you two ..."

BEHIND THE WALL: An area adjacent to a facility, where officers conduct strip searches and require incarcerated people to walk through a metal detector before they are permitted into a large area that may include the main kitchen, vocational classrooms, industrial jobs or other activities that give incarcerated people access to material that could be potentially used as weapons or to make alcohol.

BOX: Disciplinary confinement in **ADSEG.** Also referred to as **SLAM.**

BUNK: The assigned bed. Also called **RACK** or **COFFIN.**

CAMP: Synonymous with prison. Use example: "That's a messed-up camp!"

CANTEEN: The prison store or commissary. Individuals are permitted to make purchases periodically — typically once every two weeks or once a month — using funds sent from their family and friends or from working a job in prison. Some states set a spending limit. On their canteen day, they might stand in a line at the commissary window until they receive a bag of their purchases which could include instant coffee, soups and ramen packs, condiments, chips, cookies, soap, toothpaste and paper. It's also possible to buy clothing like sweatshirts, sweatpants and underwear and electronics products such as televisions, CD players, typewriters and hot water heaters. One writer described their canteen selection as similar to a gas station store or a mini-Walmart.

CENTER GATE: A checkpoint in between the housing areas and buildings for administration, chapel, education and food services. Individuals must remove hats and sunglasses when passing through it.

CHOW HALL: The dining hall. In California, it's a large building that has two dining rooms per yard holding up to 128 people each. The mass movement toward chow hall is referred to as **MAINLINE.**

COFFIN: Another word for bed. At some point in their incarceration, many prisoners, especially long-term prisoners, try to sleep their time away, but since that's not possible without the aid of medication, others might tell that person to "get up out of that coffin."

COP SHOP: The enclosed space in the center of the dayroom that serves as the officer's station.

DAYROOM: The central space in a housing unit that includes televisions, telephones, kiosk stations, microwaves, the laundry room, game room, showers, incarcerated restroom and staff restroom.

DORM: Dorm style housing unit.

- **HONOR DORM:** A housing unit with strict qualifications that allow certain privileges. Chapel orderlies, law clerks and those assigned jobs in education or at the health clinic are among those who live there. It is sometimes referred to as **PROGRAM DORM** or **BETTERMENT DORM** (sometimes derisively by others)
- **KITCHEN DORM:** A dorm where people with food service jobs live.
- **VET DORM:** A dorm where honorably discharged veterans live.

HALL: A hallway with eight cells. A term used in California prisons.

HOLDING CAGE: A tall cage that disruptive inmates are placed into until staff decide they can be safely released. There is no chair, so individuals are forced to stay standing.

HOLE: A unit that houses prisoners who are being segregated from other prisoners for various reasons (i.e., Assaultive to other inmates and/or staff, for their own safety, awaiting transfer...). In prison, there is this place called the hole, which is also known as solitary confinement. The hole is where people in prison go when they need to be sequestered from the general population for a number of infractions such as fighting, assaulting staff, substance abuse, dangerous contraband, refusing to follow orders and so on. Usually, a person is handcuffed and transported to the holding cell where they will remain until a hearing is conducted or further placement is arranged. Synonymous with **AD-SEG, ADMINISTRATIVE SEGREGATION, THE BOX, SOLITARY CONFINEMENT** and **SHU**.

HOUSE: Refers to a person's assigned dorm or cell.

JAIL: Another name for Ad-Seg when it's used for disciplinary reasons.

LAUNDRY WINDOW: Where individuals turn in their mesh laundry bags with dirty clothing on their laundry day and pick it up after they have been cleaned. The bags and/or the clothing items are tagged with a uniquely assigned laundry number.

MAIN YARD: Another name for the prison yard. This can also include non-housing spaces such as the gym, library, chapel, visiting center and Board of Parole meeting rooms. See **YARD** for full explanation.

MESS HALL: Dining hall. Synonymous with **CHOW HALL**.

MINIMUM YARD: Minimum support yards that house individuals who are close to being released. Sometimes referred to as Level Ones.

OIC: The office belonging to the captain in charge of movement and security, located in the dorm areas. Stands for officer in charge.

OVER THE WALL: The wall refers to the solid wall between the reception center and the general population yards. It is a phrase used to describe when individuals in the reception center enter the general population.

RECEPTION CENTER: Where people who are convicted of their crimes are sent to be processed before they are assigned to a prison. This is where people's criminal records, life histories, medical and mental health histories and social histories are evaluated, and they are given a custody score that helps determine their prison assignment. Each state typically has a few institutions that are designated as **RECEPTION CENTERS**.

REHABILITATION PROGRAMMING UNIT (RPU): A housing unit in California prisons that focuses on rehabilitation efforts. Residents must meet certain qualifications.

RIDING THE FENCE: Spending time at the fence that divides yards to communicate or pass items.

SIX CUBIC FEET: The total volume of possessions that individuals are legally permitted in California prisons. Anything over that amount risks confiscation.

SNF: Short for skilled nursing facility, this is a residential medical facility, used for recovery from illness or for hospice care.

THE ROW: Death row.

THE SHU (pronounced SHOE): The Special/Segregated Housing Unit. See **HOLE**. Synonymous also with **AD-SEG**, **ADMINISTRATIVE SEGREGATION** and **SOLITARY CONFINEMENT**.

UNIT: Location in prison where the cells are.

UP STATE: Refers to arriving at a prison from a county jail in California. The origin of the expression lies in the state criminal justice system sending individuals to prisons far from home. Use example: "When I go up state."

YARD: The standard definition of YARD refers to the prison grounds outside of buildings where people exercise or participate in sports activities. There might be a baseball field, basketball field and pull up bars. It is the main gathering place in prisons. However, in many locations, people also use the word to refer to the prison compound, including housing units, chow hall, medical clinic, laundry window, canteen window and the prison YARD. The word is used in the same way that we refer to a university campus. "Walking on to yard," can mean "to enter prison." In California, a facility yard includes four housing units, each with a capacity of 256 people. Prisons also have segregated yards for specific purposes. **DEATH ROW** or **AD-SEG** have their own spaces that are their own **YARDS**. A **SENSITIVE NEEDS YARD** is a yard for people who face threats from the general population for reasons such as mental illness, being a known informant, leaving a gang or being convicted of a sexual crime against children. **MINIMUM YARD** refers to minimum support yards that house individuals who are close to being released. Sometimes referred to as Level Ones. Sometimes referred to as the **POUND** (short for COMPOUND)

WOOD PILE/WOOD: The White-controlled area of the **YARD**. Use example: "He's over in the wood pile."

PEOPLE AND NICKNAMES

AIC: The official word to describe prisoners in custody in Oregon. Stands for adults in custody.

AKH: A term of respect addressed to a Muslim. The term has its root in Arabic.

BABY: A term most often used to describe someone who is playing the female role in a prison relationship. Can be derogatory.

BOY: A term most often used to describe someone who is playing the female role in a prison relationship. Can be derogatory.

CAR: The group one associates within a prison, typically bonded by geography, crime or race (i.e. your homies). Use example: "Randy has the keys (i.e. the shot caller/leader) for the Fresno White CAR," or "Who is in the car with you?"

CELLIE: Cellmate. Can also be called **BUNKIE** or **PARTNER**. Sometimes written as **CELLY**.

CELL SLUG: An individual that rarely leaves his cell.

CELL WARRIOR: A loud and seemingly violent individual, who only makes displays within the safety of his own cell.

CHAP: Short for chaplain.

CHECK OFF: A person that requests protective custody out of fear. Usage example: "That guy is just a check off."

CHO MO: A child molester. Usage example: "This dorm is full of cho mos."

CONTROL BOOTH OFFICER: The officer who sits in a booth and electronically controls the doors in housing areas. Sometimes referred to as TOWER OFFICER.

CONVICT: Also referred to as **CON** or **YARDIE**. An established prisoner who has been incarcerated long enough to understand prison politics and has earned the respect of both the population and administration. A convict is considered to be solid. You don't "get over" on a convict.

COUNSELORS: Prison staff that are assigned to each individual to deal with their classification and any other needs regarding their placement within the prison system. In California, they might also be referred to as CC1.

DEMO: Someone who is a skilled fighter and can hurt others. Use example: Put a demo down on him (translation: Beat the fuck out of him).

DOG: A loyal friend.

DUCK: Someone who is considered vulnerable and is asked to perform tasks like holding contraband or getting ice for another person. Can also be used as a verb. In some prisons, it refers to someone who does what he is told by authorities. Use example: "Go duck that new guy out to take the heat off Johnny."

FISH: An inmate unfamiliar with prison norms. A reference to "a fish out of water."

FLOOR STAFF: Refers to the officers working in the unit who walk the tier, conduct counts and security checks and distribute the mail.

GANGSTER: A true criminal or a rap music artist who sings songs about life on the streets.

GOON SQUAD OR GOONER: The **INVESTIGATIVE SERVICES UNIT**, which function as the police within prison. They investigate the misdeeds of those inside. In California, they are dressed in black uniforms and walk around with dogs.

GUERRERO: Warrior.

HOMEBOY: Someone who is from the same town as another person. Also referred to as **HOMIE** or **HOMES**.

INMATE: A) Someone who has yet to establish trust. B) Someone who is easily fooled, forced or talked into doing something detrimental to them. It's said that **INMATES** are easy to "get over" on. (This is the definition described by PJP's incarcerated writers to provide context on how some of their communities use this term. For more guidance, see the Prison Journalism Toolkit's [Language Around Incarceration](#).)

JACKET: Someone, who has a jacket on them, is a person who others distrust, such as a known rat. It may also refer to a person who testified against someone at their trial or in another case. Usage example: "Don't talk around Johnny. He's got a jacket on him."

J-CAT: A crazy or foolish person. The "J" refers to the mentally ill classification when California used letters to label incarcerated people. Usage example: "That J-Cat is peeing in the garbage can."

JITT: Short for "jitterbug," referring to a young person in his early 20s.

JOON JOON: An individual who is used by someone else for their canteen purchases or other goods and services. A **JOON JOON** is typically not liked or respected.

KEYS: To be in charge of a prison **CAR**. Usage example: "Yo, who got the keys for Compton?"

MISSILE: Used in connection with an individual, who is ordered to assault another person, typically by a gang that wants to send a message. Used at Moberly Correctional Center in Missouri. Usage example: "Johnny got missiled out yesterday."

OG: Short for "Old Gangster." A term of endearment and respect for older individuals. Usage example: "OG, you want my milk?"

OTHERS: Anyone, who is not part of a major racial group. Includes Asians, Middle Easterners, Jewish and foreigners. Usage example: "I roll with the Others OG."

PARTNER: Close friend (no sexual connotation), usually cellmates. Also known as **CELLIE** or **BUNKIE**.

PATCHED: A gang member with a PATCH (tattoo) that signifies his gang affiliation, typically after the initiation or prospecting phase.

P.C.: Someone in protective custody. Usage example: “He PC’ed up and is off the mainline.”

PISA (pronounced PIE-SA): A non-gang affiliated Latino. Migrant laborers tend to fall into this category.

POPS: A term of genuine respect for an older person, typically in his 70s.

PUNK: Derogatory term for a gay or transgendered individual. The word implies feminine traits and is used as an insult. Calling someone a **PUNK** is guaranteed to start a fight.

RAT: Someone who has a reputation as an informant.

SCREW/SHIT EATER/THE FUZZ/FIFE: Derogatory terms used to refer to corrections officers who are disliked by the prison population.

SNITCH: An informant. Usage example: “That guy is a snitch.”

STRIKERS: Anyone sentenced under California’s Three Strikes Law.

STUD: A masculine woman.

THIRTY-EIGHT HOT: Refers to someone who is very angry.

TRICK: Someone who offers financial support under the belief that they are in a relationship.

UNC (pronounced UNK): A term of respect for an older person. Typically, it refers to someone in his 50s or 60s, but it can refer to someone who is older relative to themselves. Short for uncle.

WATERHEAD: A SNITCH. Usage example: “That dude’s a waterhead.”

PRISON ECONOMY AND FOOD

BALL: A dollar.

BINDLE: An individual packet of tobacco (usually a third of a cigarette) or marijuana. Also a unit of value for transactions valued at a market rate of \$2 to \$3 dollars. Usage example: “A book of stamps (10 USPS stamps in perfect condition) for three bindles.”

BOOK OF STAMPS: Stamps, including older stamps, canceled stamps and singles, are used as currency in prisons. At one prison in Texas, canceled stamps are considered “compound stamps” and valued at 35 cents each. A book of 20 stamps is the equivalent of 700 compound stamps. The value can be different depending on the prison and state.

BOWL SHOT: A homemade meal from commissary items. Often uses a ramen or a cracker base with chili, cheese, pickle, etc layered on top.

BULLET: A piece cut from a whole cigarette. Also referred to as **CLIP**.

CADILLAC: Instant coffee with a piece of a Milky Way candy bar, creamer and sweetener added. In some prisons, it can also mean an entire cigarette.

CLUCK: To barter something of value (usually to ultimately purchase a **BUNDLE** or drugs). Usage example: “Cluck a college notebook (often free with a class and saved as a means of barter) for three soups.”

CONNEX: Large storage containers.

COVER UP: When a rival gang takes control of the prison yard, and the losing gang has to tattoo over their **PATCH** to make it null and void. Usage example: He was taken out because he didn’t cover up.

DEAD: A previous problem or issue that is resolved. It also could mean a deal that was supposed to happen but didn’t or to let the past rest. Usage example: “Are you going to pay me what you owe me this Friday?” Response: “My money didn't hit. That's dead.”

DOVE: \$5.

FISHING: When a person creates a long strand of fabric often from bed sheets and attaches a weight at the end to pass items from one cell to another.

GROCERIES: A term which refers to canteen food items.

THE HOMEWRECKER: The turkey sausage that is served once a month in Florida prisons.

HOCH: Some form of alcohol (from any source including hand sanitizer) that is diluted so it is drinkable and survivable. Also called **MASH** or **BUCK**.

HUSTLE: A means of income such as the sale of artwork, legal work or gambling enterprises.

INK: Tattoos.

JUTE BALL: Food condensed into a ball for consumption, generally made in solitary confinement.

KICKER: A fermented starter used to make **PRUNO** (alcohol). Usage example: “Yo, anyone got a kicker I can have?”

NICKEL: \$5 or a small amount of marijuana, costing \$5.

QUARTERLY PACKAGE (QP): Incarcerated people in California have the privilege (which can be taken away with a 115 rules violation) to order and receive a package of up to [30 pounds](#) from an approved outside vendor once a calendar quarter.

OBAMACARE: Free items given at the **CANTEEN** such as lotion, sunscreen, hydrocortisone cream, eye drops, Naproxen pain killers, etc.

ONE ON: A one-man meal. Usage example: "I'm about to make a one on."

PORTER: A janitorial position assigned to prisoners.

PRUNO: Homemade alcohol from a fruit, bread and sugar base with a **KICKER** of old **PRUNO**. This is why pure sugar candy is not allowed in **CANTEEN**). Usage example: "T-bone got busted with a pruno bucket."

RACK: A prison style energy drink. A combination of a caffeinated beverage such as soda, coffee or tea mixed with an enormous amount of sugar that is boiled down.

RIP: Tobacco. RIP is an acronym for "Rolled In Prison." Also referred to as **BACCA** or **LOOSE**.

SHOOT: Means to give or deliver an item, usually from the canteen, to someone located in another living unit through a friend or resident of that unit. Usage example: "I'll shoot you some soups and coffee."

SHOT: A single serving of instant coffee as a way of measuring value. Usage example: "Got a soup for a shot."

SLIDES: Slip on shoes

SOUP: Usually an instant Top Ramen noodle packet that is valued at 25 cents and used as a basic unit of measure in the [prison barter economy](#). Usage example: "Soda for four soups!"

SPREAD: A communal feast consisting of a mix of leftovers and canteen purchases. Usually served in a flour tortilla. Virtually always only for one's **CAR** or race. Usage example: "Making a spread for Super Bowl. What you got (to contribute)?"

STATES: State-issued clothing assigned to the incarcerated.

STICK: A personal amount of tobacco or another substance wrapped in thin paper to be smoked. It used to be called a **ROLL** when tobacco was allowed in prison. Usage example: "Do you have any sticks for sale?"

STINGER: DIY heating element to heat water in the cell.

STORE MAN: A person who sells canteen items from his cell with an additional tax. For example, someone could sell two cans of soda for three cans back later. Or, someone might borrow a bag of coffee but would have to pay a bag back, plus a box of sugar as the tax. Also referred to as **STORE BOX**.

TAILOR MADE: An entire cigarette.

WORK EXCHANGE: A process point that clears people, so they can go into the work area of the prison.

ZOOM ZOOMS AND WAM WAMS: Items bought from the canteen, such as chips, cookies, cakes and candy. It can also refer to junk food or meals one could purchase at a gas station.

NAVIGATING THE LEGAL SYSTEM

12/12: The final day of one's sentence. Refers to the fact that a full calendar year has twelve months, and one cannot go any farther. Usage example: "I 12/12 my sentence on May 15th."

BID: Prison sentence. Usage example: "Is this your first bid?"

BOARD: A reference to the Board of Parole Hearings, which determine parole suitability.

CATCH/CAUGHT: Refers to receiving charges or sentences. Usage example: "I **CAUGHT** two conspiracy charges. I **CAUGHT** 25 years."

DE FACTO LWOP: Any sentence with a parole date beyond the individual's life expectancy.

ELBOW: A life sentence. Usage example: "I got an elbow."

EPRO: Earliest possible release date.

HOT ONE: A murder charge. Usage example: "I caught a hot one in Richmond."

JCAP: Juveniles convicted as adults.

LEGAL BEAGLE: Jailhouse lawyer. A prisoner who has learned the rudiments of criminal and civil law though some are versed in many areas of law.

LWOP: Reference to a sentence of life without parole or a person with an LWOP sentence. This is often handed down as an alternative to the death penalty. The only chance of release for LWOPs is a commutation (although some states like California provide exceptions for those who were under 18 when they were convicted).

ON STATE: A reference to serving a prison sentence under state law in state prison.

OVER THE HUMP: A reference to having served half of one's prison sentence.

PAROLE BOARD: Board of Parole Hearings (BPH). Referred to by the incarcerated sometimes as **BOARD**.

SHAKEDOWN/SEARCH PARTY: An event when **COs** enter cells and dorms to search for contraband. They can happen randomly or if they're looking for something specifically.

SLUG: Synonymous with **TICKET**.

TICKET: A violation of rules that brings an individual before a hearing officer to adjudicate the matter. In New York there are three violation levels: Tier I, II and III. Tier I is considered a minor violation and can result in cell confinement and the loss of a privilege for up to 13 days. Tier II is a more serious offense that can result in the loss of privileges, cell confinement for up to 30 days and a \$5 surcharge. Tier III is

the most serious offense and can result in a breadth of sanctions as well as a criminal charge. Guys have previously been given as much as a decade in the SHU. Also referred to as SLUG or WRITE UP.

TO BE DOWN: The length of time that one has been incarcerated. Usage example: “How long have you been down?”

WRITE UP: Synonymous with **TICKET**.

X DAYS TO THE GATE: Number of days to parole out of prison.

YPED: Youth Parole Eligibility Date. This is an early parole eligibility date given to individuals who were convicted at age 25 or younger, except those convicted under the state's Three Strikes Law and those given the death penalty. Those who received a life sentence without parole at under age 18 are also eligible. See California Department of Corrections and Rehabilitation's [page on youth offender parole hearings](#) for more information.

NAVIGATING PRISON

BACKDOOR PAROLE: Dying in prison.

BANGER: A shank or prison knife. Usage example: "Don't worry, I got my own banger." Also referred to as **FIRE** or **HEAT**.

BET THAT UP: A phrase of extreme gratitude after receiving something from another person.

BIRDBATH: The act of washing oneself in one's cell when one is locked down and unable to access the shower. A birdbath is performed by plugging the bottom of the sink with a piece of cardboard and filling the basin up with water. An individual removes their clothes and stands over the toilet facing the sink and washes, using water scooped with a cup.

BLACK: Slang for heroin.

BLOW REC: To make a serious error or blunder.

BLUE SHEET: A charge of a violation in New Jersey. Usage example: “The officer wrote every inmate who refused an order a blue sheet.”

BUCK: To disobey or to refuse. Sometimes it can refer to homemade spirits.

BULLET: The fingertip of a disposable glove that has been ripped off and filled with an illegal substance, twisted and tied off, and then inserted into the rectum for transport.

BUST DOWN: A term used for exercising vigorously, often doing burpees.

CHAIN GANG: To be locked up. It originates from the antiquated term referring to road squads of incarcerated people chained together.

CLAPPED: To be robbed. Usage example: “Man, he was clapped.”

COLD MEDS: Medication that is permitted to be kept by an individual without requiring a nurse to distribute it. Opposite of **HOT MEDS**.

CRISIS: A form of suicide watch.

DEUCE: K2 synthetic marijuana. Usage example: "Did you see him wig out on that deuce?"

DIESEL THERAPY: Prison transfer. Usage example: "I hear they're giving him some diesel therapy."

DOG LEASH: A short lead that has a metal clip on it that is used to control an individual's movement while being transported in solitary confinement.

DOWN: Used in the context of the length of times a person has been incarcerated. Also used in reference to supporting "The Cause," whether it's a race or gang affiliation.

DRAMA: A fight or an assault.

EPI: Short for episode. An adverse reaction to the consumption of synthetic marijuana.

FADE: A fight.

FAM BAM: Family visit. Overnight visits with a family member or a legally married partner.

FIRE: A shank or prison knife. Usage example: "Dude's got dat fire on 'em." Also referred to as **HEAT** or **BANGER**.

FIVE-o: Code for "A CO is coming."

FLIP: To have possessions in one's locker or cell thrown everywhere or destroyed during a **SHAKEDOWN**.

FREE CASE: To be set up by staff and be sent to solitary for a violation that you did not commit. Usage example: I was free cased in that cell search. That CO has it out for me.

GAS: Used to describe something that's enjoyed or of high quality. Usage example: "Tom Brady? Oh, dat bitch gas!"

GASSING: Throwing liquid on someone.

TO GET YOUR MIND RIGHT: To rethink things and priorities and to work on your mental health.

GOT HANDS: A term used to describe a person that's able to fight well, winning altercations more than losing. It's said that someone possessing these skills **GOES HARD IN THE PAINT**. This means that a person's punches are quick, hard and accurate. Other words to describe this: **GET THERE, BUMPIN' 1000%**.

HEAT: A shank or prison knife. Also referred to as **FIRE** or **BANGER**.

HOOP: Hiding contraband in the rectum. Usage example: Hector is the mule hooping for the Northerners in North Block.

HIT THE ALARM: The alarm button COs press that bring other officers running while the people who are incarcerated sit or lay prone on the floor.

HIT THE GATE: To enter **PROTECTIVE CUSTODY**.

HIT THE ROOM: When officers go into a cell and do an extensive search. Also see **SHAKEDOWN**.

HIT THE VENT: Have a conversation through the air vents.

HOT MEDS: Medication that must be given under the supervision of a nurse, so it can be verified that they were taken. These meds are not permitted to be in an individual's possession. Opposite of **COLD MEDS**.

JACK: Masturbation. Usage example: "He went to the **HOLE** on a jack charge."

THE JACK: The phone.

JAILIN': Passing time. Usage example: "The guys jailed off of each by telling jokes."

JUICE CARD: Having influence with the guards.

K-9: A code for "Police are coming." Sometimes referred to as **FIVE-O**.

KICKING ROCKS: A term used to describe when someone is loitering. Typically used when telling someone to keep moving and not stop for conversation.

LIGHT 'EM UP: To attack or fight someone abruptly and severely using fists or **FIRE** (shank or knife).

LOCKER SHOPPING: To comment (or steal) the contents of another person's private locker. Usage example: "Hey what you locker shopping for?"

LOCK IN A SOCK: To literally put a lock in a sock to hit someone.

LUG: An indirect comment said deliberately toward a specific person who is within earshot. It can be used to bait people into an argument or fight.

MANDO: Mandatory. Usage example: "Wearing your shoes to and from the dayroom is mando."

NUTS 'N BUTTS: A term used to describe a strip search.

ONE UP, ONE DOWN: When one cellmate sleeps, and one stays awake in case there is trouble.

OP: Opposition. Someone or anything can be an **OP**.

PAINT: To beat or stab someone until they are bloody.

PATCH: Gang tattoo.

PENCIL WHIP: To file a grievance against staff or guards.

PHONE CALL: When someone from another building wants to talk with a mate outside. Usage example: "Hey, you got a phone call." (Meaning you should go to the front door).

PILL CALL: The distribution of medication, which could include insulin, psychiatric meds and other non-over-the-counter medication.

PLATE: Gang terminology for having a price on an individual's head.

POLITICS: This could refer specifically to race relations or other politics. Usage example: "It's **POLITICS** man, you can't sit at this table.

PRESS: To be extorted for money, phone time, canteen items or sexual favors from another. Usage example: Johnny was getting **PRESSED** by the Bloods.

PRISON PURSE: A person's butt.

PUNK: A derogatory terms for a gay person. Also referred to as **BOY**.

REMOVAL: Assaulting someone for the purpose of getting them off the **YARD**.

SEARCH PARTY: An event when **COs** enter cells and dorms to search for contraband. They can happen randomly or if they're looking for something specifically. Synonymous with **SHAKEDOWN**.

SHINE: Usually used as a verb. If someone wants to showcase his skill or talent to look better than another, it is said that "he's trying to shine on him."

SHOT: When someone gets cut or stabbed.

SLIDE: To go somewhere on the compound without detection. It's typically used in connection with a fight. When someone asks you to **SLIDE**, it is an invitation that is not going to go away. A **SLIDE IN** is an invitation to slide out of bounds into a room to fight. Usage example: "Come over here and slide with me."

SMASH: Lockdown. Usage example: "They put us on a smash due to COVID."

SPRAY: A term which refers to someone gossiping about another.

SQUASH: To resolve a matter.

STAND IN THE PAINT: To stand up for what or who you believe is right.

STAY IN YOUR LANE: A phrase meaning mind your own business.

STICK: Fairly new jargon that refers to a strip of paper laced with K2 synthetic marijuana.

STRAPPED: Carrying a weapon on one's person, usually in a sling under a T-shirt. Usage example: "No one messes with the Nortenos, they're always strapped."

SUITCASE: A person's butt or the act of shoving something there for storage or to hide from the **FUZZ** (COs). Usage example: "Henry went to the **box** for 210 days after he suitcased two cellphones, two chargers and 56 grams of loose tobacco." Similar to **PRISON PURSE**.

TAKE FLIGHT: To start a fight. Usage example: "When he came back from the yard, he saw his cellie locker shopping in his locker and took flight."

TAKE YOUR SHOW ON THE ROAD: To get in trouble in a facility and get shipped to another facility. Also referred to as **BLOWING THE SPOT**.

TENT UP: The practice of typing sheets around your bunk bed for privacy.

TOOCHI: Commonly card stock that's been saturated in bug spray and smoked. Can get people sick. A problem particularly in Florida's prisons. To **WACK** or **GOOG** means to react poorly after smoking **TOOCHI**. Symptoms include vomiting on yourself, losing the ability to walk, experiencing extreme panic and losing one's bowels.

UP THE ROAD: Refers to being sentenced to prison. Usage example: "I'm going up the road."

WAND: A handheld metal detector.

WASHED UP: Refers to having one's life taken by a **LWOP** (life without parole) sentence.

WE CAN GET IT: To tell another prisoner that we can fight.

WITH THE BUSINESS: Used to indicate a participant involved in prison gang **POLITICS**.

WHACK: To stab someone.

WHIP: To be in the **WHIP** means to be a part of a particular social set. To get "kicked out of the **WHIP**" means to be excommunicated.

WHITE: Slang for meth.

WIDE OPEN: This can mean that the prison is unrestricted in a negative sense (debauchery) or positive sense (not controlled as a supermax facility).

YARD DOGS: Workout shoes.

YARD DOWN: When an alarm requires everyone to sit or lay on the ground on their stomach until the alarm clears.

YARD OPEN: A comical term used in jest whenever someone bends at the waist.

STATE SPECIFIC SHORTHAND FOR RULES AND REGULATIONS

CALIFORNIA

115: The form document number used by CO's to charge an inmate with a rules violation. It can result in a loss of privileges like visits, canteen purchases, quarterly packages and yard access with the possible loss of **GOOD CONDUCT TIME CREDITS**. 115s go on an individual's permanent record and can impact parole decisions. According to one writer, one 115 could result in a denial of parole consideration for three to five years. Use example: "Gave me a 115 for standing up during count."

128: An informational notation in your official file that can be good or bad. Also referred to as **CHRONO**.

222: A code for emergency.

602: The form document number to file a complaint against a CO. Part of a grievance procedure to appeal any action by the California Department of Corrections and Rehabilitation (CDCR) and any of its employees. It used to be possible to file a group 602 similar to a class action civil suit. Use example: "I'm gonna 602 that mother for taking my charger."

MEDICAL 602: A form document that specifically relates to one's healthcare and the decisions a provider might make. Because you cannot get a second opinion inside prison, individual's often file this form when the provider denies a specific treatment.

812: Mental health

1015: Code for an incarcerated person.

5150: Mental health hold

7219: A medical exam to note injuries to custody staff

1ST WATCH: 10 p.m. – 6 a.m.

2ND WATCH: 6 a.m. – 2 p.m.

3RD WATCH: 2 p.m. – 10 p.m.

TITLE 15: The handbook detailing the correctional department laws.

FLORIDA

60/180: A nickname for marijuana. Refers to the penalty for being caught with marijuana — 60 days in confinement and 180-day loss of good time per incident.

CHAPTER 33: Exclusive to Florida Department of Corrections - the rules and regulations as they pertain to the incarcerated, a prisoner's code of conduct, basic instructions on how to navigate the bureaucracy of Florida's prison system.

CONTRIBUTORS

David Annarelli (Virginia); Christopher Blackwell (Washington); Artemus Blankenship (California); Wayne Boatwright (California); Robert Chiossi (N.J.); Jonathan Chiu (California); Gary Farlow (South Carolina); Brian Hindson (Texas); Jonathan Houston (Florida) Dorothy Maraglino (California); Kory McClary (N.J.); Lawrence May (California); Jessie Milo (California); JoyBelle Phelan (Colorado); Reginald Stephen (New York); Patricia Trimble (Missouri); Cal Whidden (Florida)