



STATE OF WASHINGTON
DEPARTMENT OF CORRECTIONS

APPLICABILITY
PRISON
FACILITY/SPANISH MANUALS

REVISION DATE
12/31/23

PAGE NUMBER
1 of 13

NUMBER
DOC 450.100

POLICY

TITLE
MAIL FOR INDIVIDUALS IN PRISON

REVIEW/REVISION HISTORY:

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Revised: 6/7/07 AB 07-016	Revised: 12/31/23

SUMMARY OF REVISION/REVIEW:

Major changes to include updating requirements, process changes, and reorganization of content. Read carefully!

APPROVED:

Signature on file

CHERYL STRANGE, Secretary
Department of Corrections

12/6/23

Date Signed

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REFERENCES:

DOC 100.100 is hereby incorporated into this policy; [RCW 72.02.260](#); [RCW 72.09.450](#); [WAC 137-36](#); [WAC 137-48](#); DOC 200.000 Trust Accounts for Incarcerated Individuals; DOC 320.255 Restrictive Housing; DOC 320.260 Secured Housing Units; DOC 420.375 Contraband and Evidence Handling (RESTRICTED); DOC 440.000 Personal Property in Prisons; DOC 450.120 Packages for Individuals in Prison; DOC 450.050 Prohibited Contact; DOC 450.300 Visits for Incarcerated Individuals; DOC 460.000 Disciplinary Process for Prisons; DOC 460.050 Disciplinary Sanctions; DOC 500.100 Correspondence Education in Prisons; DOC 590.500 Legal Access for Incarcerated Individuals; [USPS Domestic Mail Manual](#); [IRS Blue Bag Program](#)

POLICY:

- I. The Department recognizes the importance of mail and its role in supporting community connections as a critical component of success in reentry.
- II. The Department has established procedures to maintain safety and security governing mail to/from incarcerated individuals.
- III. Allowances and limits outlined in this policy may be restricted per DOC 320.255 Restrictive Housing and DOC 320.260 Secured Housing Units.
- IV. It is a federal offense to attempt to or use the United States Postal Service (USPS) or a private/commercial carrier to introduce contraband or illegal drugs into a correctional facility.

DIRECTIVE:

- I. General Requirements
 - A. Correspondence between incarcerated individuals and their correspondents will be limited to the USPS, United Parcel Service (UPS), Federal Express (FedEx), and the contracted electronic messages service provider.
 - B. Individuals will be responsible for informing their correspondents of the rules governing mail for incarcerated individuals, which can be reviewed on the [Family & Visitors Send Something](#) section of the Department's external website.
 - C. The Superintendent/designee may place limits on the volume, length, content, or source of mail when necessary to maintain safety and security.
 - D. An individual's writing privileges to a person or group may be restricted when:
 1. Court ordered

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2. Prohibited per DOC 450.050 Prohibited Contact
3. Sanctioned per DOC 460.050 Disciplinary Sanctions
4. Requested by a person/group in writing
5. The recipient is a minor and the minor's parent or guardian has submitted a written request that the privilege be terminated
6. Specific cause exists as supported by criteria in this policy

E. Excluding weekends, holidays, or emergency situations, approved mail will be processed within:

1. 2 business days for first class mail
2. 7 business days for electronic messages
3. 7 business days for mail requiring investigative review
4. 10 business days for publications
5. 5 business days for all other mail

F. Individuals will not process, distribute, and/or possess another individual's mail.

G. Packages will be processed per DOC 450.120 Packages for Individuals in Prison.

H. Employees will retain confidentiality of mail/electronic messages unless the material is needed for administrative purposes.

II. Envelopes and Postage

A. Incarcerated individuals will use pre-franked envelopes purchased from the commissary or Correctional Industries, or may use direct return envelopes (e.g., metered, pre-paid, pre-addressed) if they are received from vendors, organizations, legal entities, or public agencies for the purpose of direct return mail.

1. Indigent individuals may receive 10 first class pre-franked envelopes per month.
2. Attempts to use an altered envelope for outgoing mail will result in the envelope and its contents being confiscated as contraband.
3. Direct return mail envelopes do not require pre-paid postage for an individual to receive and use it for the return of educational correspondence course materials.

B. Individuals will complete DOC 02-003 Postage Transfer and submit it with their letter/package to cover postage, fees, and shipping costs for:

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1. USPS special services
2. Authorized greeting cards
3. Oversized/overweight envelopes
4. Packages, including shipping insurance
5. Direct return mail envelopes to return educational correspondence course material

C. Other than noted above, postage transfer submissions submitted with letters/packages that do not have pre-franked/pre-paid postage will be returned to the individual.

D. Except for USPS specialized services, postage debt may be incurred for outgoing legal mail or mail being sent to the Office of the Corrections Ombuds.

1. Postage debt does not include USPS specialized services or electronic messaging.

E. Mail arriving at the facility with postage due will be returned to the sender.

F. Electronic stamps will be purchased electronically through the electronic message provider.

III. Inspection

A. Superintendents will designate employees to inspect and read mail to prevent sending/receiving contraband or other material that threatens facility order or security, and/or criminal activity.

1. Legal mail is subject to inspection and will be conducted per Legal Mail (Attachment 1).

B. Employees will take care not to damage mail when opening for inspection. Markings with the intention of identifying the individual's DOC number, housing, and/or authorized stamping of the envelope are acceptable.

1. Individuals will be notified when mail is received damaged, or the employee unintentionally damages mail during inspection/marketing.

C. Mail will be rejected based on legitimate penological interests and per Unauthorized Mail (Attachment 4).

D. Contraband or illegal items/drugs uncovered during inspections will be handled per DOC 420.375 Contraband and Evidence Handling (RESTRICTED). The Mailroom Supervisor will ensure:

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1. The rejection process is initiated,
 2. Original documents are placed in evidence with a copy maintained with the rejection notice in the mailroom, and
 3. The disciplinary process is initiated per DOC 460.000 Disciplinary Process for Prisons, as appropriate, and any sanction(s) imposed is enforced.
- E. Opinions critical of Department policy or personnel will not be censored.
- F. Cashier's checks and money orders must include the individual's name and DOC number.
1. If the check/money order is missing the DOC number, mailroom employees will ensure the DOC number is written on the check/money order if the individual's name matches the addressed envelope before forwarding to the facility Business Office for deposit per DOC 200.000 Trust Accounts for Incarcerated Individuals.

IV. Incoming Mail

- A. Employees will facilitate the delivery of mail and make a reasonable effort to find an intended recipient whenever possible. The individual's identity will be verified prior to delivery.
- B. Except for books, all incoming mail and publications will be date stamped the day received in the mailroom.
- C. Incoming mail must include:
1. The incarcerated individual's full legal name and DOC number. An Also-Known-As (i.e., AKA) name may be included below the legal name.
 - a. Mail that does not include the individual's full legal name and/or DOC number and received from the:
 - 1) Health Care Authority, the Washington Health Benefits Exchange, or a state approved managed care plan will be held and the Headquarters Medical Disbursement Unit will be contacted for information/direction.
 - 2) Veteran's Administration will be forwarded to the Reentry Division at Headquarters.

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2. A return address per USPS Domestic Mail Manual, including an identifiable last name or name of a business/organization.
 - a. Address labels for incoming mail are allowed unless the facility can document an ongoing security concern.
 - b. Mail that does not contain an identifiable sender (e.g., last name or the name of a business/organization is missing/unclear) will not be opened and will be returned to the address without a rejection notice issued.
 - c. Mail with no return address will be rejected and any funds included with the mail will be deposited in the Betterment Fund.

- D. Mailroom employees will remove identifying documentation (e.g., social security card, marriage/birth/death certificate) and forward them to designated employees for processing/retention. The individual will receive a receipt for the removed item(s) and a notice of its disposition.

- E. In lieu of the original, photocopies of the envelope and/or contents may be provided to the individual for safety and security reasons. Providing photocopies does not require a mail rejection notice.
 1. Copies will not be made of photographs received on photo paper.

- F. Individuals may receive photographs if they meet the following criteria:
 1. The DOC number must be written in ink upon receipt by the individual on the back center of each photograph.
 2. For the purpose of this policy, pictures contained in newspaper or magazine clippings/articles are not considered photographs.
 3. Photographs are limited to the following in one mailing. Excess photographs/pages will be rejected.
 - a. Up to 25 photographs total (i.e., separate or multiple photos on a sheet).
 - 1) Each photograph must be no less than 3" by 5" and no larger than 8½" x 11".
 - 2) Polaroids, stickers, and layered photos are not allowed.

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- b. Up to 20 bound pages with multiple photographs sent directly from a vendor (e.g., Shutterfly, Snapfish) containing photos no less than 3" x 5".
 - 4. Photographs received through an electronic message must be a single image (e.g., no collages or superimposed images).
- G. Audio recordings and devices received through the mail must be sent from the Washington Talking Book and Braille Library.
- H. Batch/bulk mailings must meet penological objectives and each item must be individually labeled with the individual's name, DOC number, and cell/room assignment.
 - 1. Batch/bulk mailings may be accepted or rejected in whole as one mailing.
- I. Tribal governments and Alaska Native villages (i.e., Indian Tribal Entity) may send paper ballots to incarcerated enrolled members for their governmental matters (e.g., elections).
 - 1. The Department will not be responsible for the validity of, tracking, or maintaining any ballot cast by an individual or the individual's eligibility to vote.
- J. For incoming certified/return receipt/signature confirmation mail, designated employees will:
 - 1. Sign and date the receipt when requested by the delivering agent,
 - 2. Inspect the mail and record it in the legal mail log,
 - 3. Ensure the mail is delivered to the individual, and
 - 4. Have the individual sign the log upon receipt.
- V. Outgoing Mail
 - A. Outgoing mail sent via USPS must have a complete return address that includes the individual's full legal name, DOC number, cell/room assignment, and the name and address of the facility.
 - 1. An AKA name may be included below the legal name.
 - B. Individuals will be provided an opportunity to correct noncompliant outgoing mail in lieu of a rejection as long as the contents do not pose a safety or security concern or subject the individual to a violation.

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1. Mailroom employees will send the mail back with a notice that identifies why the mail cannot be sent out.

C. Envelopes will be stamped with the following or similar message: "This was mailed by an individual confined at a Washington State Department of Corrections facility. Its contents are uncensored."

D. Address labels for outgoing mail are only allowed on pre-addressed envelopes used for direct return mail.

E. Individuals will use DOC 21-473 Kite, the kiosk, or USPS to correspond with employees, contract staff, and volunteers.

VI. Electronic Messages

A. Individuals must agree to the terms of service to use the electronic messaging system.

1. Individuals found to be using another individual's account, conspiring/ attempting to introduce contraband, or allowing another individual to use their account will be subject to disciplinary action and the possible suspension of all involved electronic messaging accounts.

B. Videograms (i.e., prerecorded video attached to an electronic message) may not contain content from third-party sites or previously recorded material from external sources (e.g., television, Facebook).

VII. The Office of the Corrections Ombuds Mail

A. Mail to/from the Office of the Corrections Ombuds will be treated as privileged and confidential.

B. Employees will follow the Office of the Corrections Ombuds guidelines when processing mail to/from the Office of the Corrections Ombuds and incarcerated individuals.

1. Mail will arrive in a light green envelope.

2. Incoming mail will be opened in the individual's presence, inspected, and issued by designated employees.

a. The individual may request a copy of the envelope, but the employee will maintain the original for disposal.

3. Outgoing mail must:

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- a. Not be opened by employees.
- b. Have a return address belonging to the sender.
- c. Clearly show the correct address for the Office of the Corrections Ombuds.

4. Employees will not document (e.g., mail log) sending, receiving, or issuing mail to/from the Office of the Corrections Ombuds.

VIII. Legal Mail

- A. Incarcerated individuals have the ability to correspond by means of legal mail, which must meet requirements per Legal Mail (Attachment 1).
- B. Mail received that does not qualify as legal mail will be processed as general incoming mail.

IX. Mail not Written in English

- A. Incoming and outgoing correspondence written in a language other than English, including correspondence written in more than one language, will be reviewed by an employee who is a Department-certified translator, when available.
 1. If an employee who is a Department-certified translator is unavailable, the mail will be sent to the contracted vendor for translation.
 2. An online translation service will be used for electronic messages.

X. Rejecting Mail

- A. Employees/contract staff/volunteers are strictly prohibited from using mail rejections as a form of retaliation against individuals and/or their correspondents.
- B. Rejected mail/electronic messages will be processed per Mail Rejection Process (Attachment 2).

XI. Publications

- A. Individuals may receive publications (e.g., books, magazines) and appeal rejections per Publication Guidelines (Attachment 3).

XII. Forwarding Mail

- A. Individuals will be responsible for informing their correspondents, including publishers, of a change of address.

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- B. Facilities will forward first class mail, consistent with the USPS Domestic Mail Manual, for a period of 90 days.
 - 1. Legal mail will be forwarded daily and all other mail at least weekly.
 - a. Mailroom employees will log forwarded legal mail and the addresses where they were sent.
 - 2. Mail for individuals out to court will be forwarded to the jail where they are being held.
 - 3. Legal mail for individuals transferred to a community health care facility will be delivered if they are able to personally accept it. Otherwise, it will be returned to sender marked "Incarcerated Individual Temporarily/ Currently Unable to Accept Mail".
 - a. All other mail for individuals transferred to a community health care facility will be held in the facility mailroom until they return.
 - 4. If first class mail is unopened, the new address will be noted on the envelope and returned to the USPS for forwarding. State funds will not be used to forward unopened mail.
 - 5. Opened first class mail will be placed in an envelope and mailed to the new address at the facility's expense.
- C. Publications received through the USPS will be forwarded when allowed per USPS Domestic Mail Manual.
- D. Non-profit mail will not be forwarded per USPS Domestic Mail Manual and will be discarded.

XIII. Mail Between Incarcerated Individuals

- A. Mail between individuals confined in any correctional facility will only be allowed when authorized by both Superintendents/facility administrators/designees.
 - 1. Mail can only be written material, photos, or cards and cannot contain property items (e.g., hobby craft).
 - a. Photos may only contain the approved corresponding individuals.
 - b. Only pre-manufactured greeting cards are permitted.
 - 2. An individual may communicate with a Special Commitment Center resident, which is not considered a correctional facility.

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- B. Incarcerated individuals must meet at least one of the following requirements to be allowed to communicate with another incarcerated individual:
1. Are members of the same immediate family,
 2. Have a child together, as proven through a birth certificate and only if both individuals still have parental rights, and/or
 3. Are co-parties in an active legal case, or one individual is providing a witness statement in the other individual's active legal case.
 - a. Communication between authorized individuals must be legal in nature and will not be treated as legal mail.
- C. The requesting individual will complete and submit DOC 21-746 Approval for Mail between Incarcerated Individuals to the case manager with any supporting documentation.
1. The case manager will verify the request meets policy requirements and forward the request with any supporting documentation to the Superintendent/designee for a final decision.
 2. Approvals may be accepted by any receiving facility upon an individual's transfer at the discretion of the Superintendent/designee.
 3. Approvals for legal-related correspondence will not be handled as legal mail and will expire when:
 - a. Confirmation is received from the Attorney General's Office that the case has been resolved/closed or witness statements have been received, or
 - b. When either co-party releases from custody.
 4. Approvals may be revoked at any time by the Superintendent/facility administrator/designee.

XIV. Mail Records

- A. The Superintendent/designee will designate an employee(s) to manage mail delivery, receipt, and regulations, and maintain a continuous, chronological mail log. The log will:
1. Be maintained in the mailroom, living unit office, or mail sorting area for the following types of incoming/outgoing mail:

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- a. Packages
 - b. Mail and publication rejections
 - c. Legal mail and certified/return receipt/signature confirmation mail
 - d. Items of monetary value (e.g., money order, cash, cashier's check)
2. For legal mail, be documented on DOC 21-286 Legal Mail Log or similar log, including:
- a. Source
 - b. Destination
 - c. Date received/sent
 - d. Description
 - e. Printed name and signature of employee distributing the mail
 - f. Signature of individual receiving/sending the mail

XV. Quality Assurance

- A. Quality assurance checks of electronic records relating to mailroom activities will be performed weekly.
- B. Onsite quality assurance checks will be performed yearly or as necessary at each facility mailroom. An auditing tool will be used and an action plan developed when necessary.

DEFINITIONS:

The following words/terms are important to this policy and are defined in the glossary section of the Policy Manual: Contraband, Immediate Family, Indigent, Legal Mail, Legal Pleadings, Letters, Mail, Packages, and Retaliation. Other words/terms appearing in this policy may also be defined in the glossary section.

ATTACHMENTS:

Legal Mail (Attachment 1)
 Mail Rejection Process (Attachment 2)
 Publication Guidelines (Attachment 3)
 Unauthorized Mail (Attachment 4)

DOC FORMS:

DOC 02-003 Postage Transfer
 DOC 05-525 Rejection Notice
 DOC 13-508 Accommodation Status Report
 DOC 21-286 Legal Mail Log



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DOC 21-473 Kite

DOC 21-746 Approval for Mail between Incarcerated Individuals

DOC 21-757 Publication Rejection Appeal