How the Indigency Process Works at DOC

STATEWIDE FAMILY COUNCIL MEETING, SEPTEMBER 19, 2026

PHOEBE HUTSELL, TRUST ACCOUNTING MANAGER

Department of Corrections
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What is Indigency?

- RCW 72.09.015(15) defines indigency to mean: "an inmate who has less than a $100 balance of disposable income in his or her institutional account on the day a request is made to utilize funds and during the 30 days previous to the request."

- House Bill 2539 (RCW 72.09.475) in the 2026 Regular Legislative Session changed the indigency rate from $25 to $100 and created a process to review the indigency rate every four years beginning July 1, 2029.

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WAC 137-55 Personal Hygiene

- In researching some concerns submitted by friends/family, we discovered these WACs had not been updated since January 1997—nearly 30 years!
- This section of WAC will be rescinded as they duplicate DOC policy subject matter and is significantly out of date.
- Unless required by a specific RCW, DOC is exempt from creating WAC with respect to persons in our custody (RCW 34.05.030).

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Why are debts charged?

- RCW 72.09.450 requires that:
  - “An inmate shall not be denied access to services or supplies required by state or federal law solely on the basis of his or her inability to pay for them.”
  - “The department shall record all lawfully authorized assessments for services or supplies as a debt to the department. The department shall recoup the assessments when the inmate's institutional account exceeds the indigency standard.”
  - Debt collection will not reduce an account below the indigency level.

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What determines debt collection?

- RCW 72.09.111 mandates deduction amounts as percentages of wages, gratuities, or benefits, depending on the type of debt and the work class in which the wages or gratuities are earned.

- This RCW drives DOC Policy 200.000 "Trust Accounts for Incarcerated Individuals"
  - The Deductions Matrix provides a comprehensive summary of deduction percentages by type of deposit and nature of debt.

- Debt collection will not take an incarcerated individual's account balance below the indigent level (currently $100).

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How are hygiene products selected?

- DOC Policy 440.080 (DOC 940.080 Women's Prisons) "Hygiene and Grooming in Men's Prisons and Reentry Centers" defines personal hygiene items issued to newly received or transferred individuals and replenishment ***guidelines***.
  - Guidelines allow for an "in use" item and an unused item to be retained.
- After the initial issue, individuals are responsible for replenishing their own personal hygiene supplies.
- "Over the counter" health-related items are identified by Health Services (DOC 650.040)

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How are hygiene products selected?

- The statewide commissary manager determines products offered for sale, and individuals have an opportunity to provide input into the selection of commissary items.
  - The most cost-effective item that can be sourced by the commissary procurement team is offered as the indigent selection
  - Individuals can submit product selections via “kite” to their local commissary staff
    - Commissary procurement team maintains a database of product suggestions that is referenced when replacing products.
  - The Commissary Program management team visits each facility annually to collect program feedback and product suggestions.

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Commissary Sub-Account

- Created by Senate Bill 5131 (RCW 72.09.480(9), allows Incarcerated Individuals to receive funds directly to their commissary sub-account without being subject to mandatory deductions.

- Funds in the commissary account can only be used to purchase commissary items.

- Funds remaining in the commissary account upon release are subject to mandatory deductions

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Question & Answer Time