

# FACTSHEET

## For family and friends of those detained in USA



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**When someone is first detained abroad, it can be daunting and confusing for family members and friends to get to grips with an unfamiliar system. This factsheet is designed to give practical tips and advice to the friends and family members of those detained in the USA. If you require further information about anything contained in this factsheet please contact Prisoners Abroad.**

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## **1 Introduction**

In order to locate further information about the facility or regulations discussed in this factsheet, you will need to locate the website of the “Department of Corrections” which administers the relevant prison, or ask Prisoners Abroad to print information from these websites if you do not have internet access. To locate the correct website and regulations you will first need to establish if the detainee is being held in the “federal”, “state”, “county” or “immigration” system.

**Federal System** You will know if the detainee is being held in the Federal System because the prison will have the word “Federal” in it.

The authority governing this system is the *Federal Bureau of Prisons* and their website can be found at [www.bop.gov](http://www.bop.gov)

If your relative or friend is in the Federal System, it *does not matter* what state in the USA the facility is located in, and any regulations or websites about that state system will not be relevant to you.

**State System** A detainee is usually being held by the State system if they have been sentenced and are not being held in the Federal system (i.e. if the prison does not have the word “Federal” in it). These institutions are usually known as Correctional Facilities or Institutions, or State prisons or Complex. For example “Columbia Correctional Institution” or “Arizona State Prison Complex”

In order to locate the Department of Corrections Website for the state in which your friend or family member is being held, either go to the following website <http://nicic.org/Features/LinkDirectory/> and click on “State Departments of Corrections” or do an internet search for the name of that state’s Department of Corrections – so for example “Arizona Department of Corrections” or “Florida Department of Corrections”.

Looking for the name of the prison may also bring up some results.

**County System** - If a detainee is not being held in the Federal System or by the State, they might be held by a local county in a County Jail or Prison. This is usually while someone is on remand.

Finding information might be more difficult, so you could look for a general website about that particular county, or do a search for the prison’s name to see if the prison itself has a website.

**Immigration Facility** A detainee is held in an Immigration Detention Center (IDC) or an Immigration and Customs Enforcement Facility (ICE) prior to their deportation from the USA.

Information can be found at [www.ice.gov/pi/dro](http://www.ice.gov/pi/dro) and [www.ice.gov/pi/dro/facilities.htm](http://www.ice.gov/pi/dro/facilities.htm) where you will also find a list of all Immigration Facilities along with their regulations and addresses.

## **2 Visiting a detainee in the USA**

Visiting a friend or a family member who is held abroad can be a daunting prospect – there are many arrangements to make, a different system and culture to come to terms with, flights and hotels to book. Support is available! Call Prisoners Abroad if you would like to discuss your visit, or if you are unable to find hotels or locate maps or local travel information, so that we can try to assist with this.

If you are planning to visit someone in an American facility, your experience may be easier if you have familiarised yourself with the visiting regulations of the particular institution before you go. Visiting regulations and arrangements vary from facility to facility and state to state.

To locate the regulations about visiting the facility where your family member is being held, you should look at the Department of Corrections’ website, or the prison’s website (if there is one), or you could ask the person you are visiting to explain or send any procedures to you. Please ask Prisoners Abroad to try to locate and send you these regulations if they are published on the internet and you do not have internet access.

Some common themes which you should bear in mind regardless of where you are visiting are:

- there is usually an approval scheme or registration process to follow before you are able to visit – this might entail asking the detainee to send you a form to complete before you will become “approved” to visit that person, or sometimes the detainee themselves needs to submit your name to be part of the approved list and there is no action required from the person visiting. If you change address during the detention, this usually needs to be changed on the approved visiting list also.
- find out if a visit needs to be booked or if you are able to turn up at the facility at certain times. If you can simply turn up at certain times, ensure that you have confirmed with the person you are visiting that they are expecting you and they will not be at any classes/recreation, which may prevent you from visiting at that time.
- bear in mind that you should dress appropriately for the visit– the particular regulations will specify what this means, but shorts, open toed shoes or sandals, very short skirts or tops, and offensive words or phrases on clothes are usually prohibited.
- you should find out what identification is needed in order to attend the visit – you will usually need a photographic ID with your date of birth (such as your passport) and sometimes further ID is required showing your address (such as your driving licence or another official ID or letter/document)
- there may be special visiting regulations for children under 18 years old.

### **3 Sending Mail to a American Facility**

Writing to someone who is detained overseas can be an important way of maintaining a close relationship with that person. However, unless you are familiar with what you can and cannot send, difficulties and frustrations may arise. It would be advisable to read the prison’s regulations about communication and mail if this is possible. The following section offers some basic tips about what you should look out for when reading these regulations.

#### **3.1 Letters**

You should be able to contact someone in a US prison by letter, unless letter privileges have been suspended for a particular reason – we are not aware, however, of any frequent problems when sending letters to people detained in the USA and do not often hear from our clients that letter privileges have been suspended.

To ensure your letter is accepted, you must include **your address in the top left hand corner on the front of the envelope**, write the prison **ID number** next to the detainee’s name on the envelope, and do not send any other enclosures with your letter (photocopies, photographs, magazines, leaflets for example). To find out if you can send anything more than a letter, you should check with the detainee themselves, or sometimes the facilities’ or department of corrections’ website will

publish these details. Please note that to our knowledge you will not be able to send cash, stamps or phone cards with your letters.

### **3.2 Books, Magazines and Newspapers**

Some facilities will allow you to send books and magazines to your friend or family member, however many will only allow books, magazines and newspapers which have been sent directly from the publisher. This means that you will need to pay for a book or magazine subscription directly from a book or magazine publisher, and put your friend's or family member's address for the item to be sent to them directly. You should also check in advance that the publication you would like to send is likely to be accepted by that institution.

### **3.3 Parcels**

Parcels are not usually allowed; however, you can confirm this by trying to find out if there are regulations about what can and cannot be sent. Similarly, if you are planning to visit someone you should check out what can be brought in (if anything) before the visit, to avoid any disappointment on the day.

### **3.4 Searching of mail**

Another issue to bear in mind is that it is very likely in an American institution that all correspondence will be opened, read, and searched for contraband. Although you are able to write what you want, the regulations often state that this must be within the boundaries of decency. One department of corrections website advises that if you do not want someone else to read what you have written, do not write it.

One restriction on mail which we hear frequently is that detainees are not able, in many cases, to correspond with other detainees (regardless of which country the other detainee is in). This includes sending these letters via a third party (so you should not accept that a letter is sent from a detainee to you, which you then forward onto another detainee in the USA). Some clients have reported, however, that local regulations permit them to have this ban lifted in some circumstances and that they can apply to correspond with another detainee.

## **4 Telephone Calls**

Many prisons allow their detainees to make telephone calls, including telephone calls overseas. There is no obligation for any country however, in international law, to ensure that their detainees have telephone contact with the outside – this includes telephone contact with the embassy or consulate. Some institutions do not have the capacity to allow detainees to make long distance international phone calls which means that it may be difficult to find a solution or to have this changed if your family member is in such an institution. A solution could be that the detainee contacts their local embassy or consulate to ask if they can put calls through to the UK or overseas, or if they can urge their local prison authority to allow international calls.

**Please bear in mind that calls transferred to you via the embassy are VERY expensive as they are reverse charge calls.**

Some institutions which do not have a phone card scheme allow detainees to make "collect" calls which means that the person receiving the call will pay – many of these schemes allow the person to find out what the cost of the call will be before accepting

it, and may have the option to reject the call. If you reject a call, you may wish to write to the person explaining why, on that occasion, you felt you were unable to speak to them at that time.

**Reverse charge calls from a USA prison institution to the UK are EXTREMELY expensive, even if they are very short. Try to find out the cost of these calls before accepting them.**

Some family members have reported that rather than the person detained using the collect call/reverse charge system, it is much cheaper to send money to assist the person to buy phone cards if this is possible, rather than accepting calls through the embassy or collect calls dialled directly. Please note that it is very unlikely that the regulations will allow you to send phonecards and cash to any detainee.

## **5 Sending Money**

### **5.1 *Will someone detained in an American facility need money?***

Although all basic meals will be provided, many American detainees advise that it is useful to have some money in the prison. This can be used to buy basics not provided by the authorities, such as toiletries, paper and envelopes, stamps, extra food, phone cards (if needed). Sometimes detainees will need to provide a co-payment towards their medical costs or doctor's visits.

### **5.2 *How should money be sent to an American facility?***

Prisoners Abroad advises that all family members based in the UK should send money through the Foreign and Commonwealth prison comforts scheme. A separate factsheet is available about this, which is also located in our "Handbook for Family and Friends" and on our website.

Family members based in the USA may find it easier to send funds directly to the institution – the regulations will either be on the facility's or department of corrections' website, or the detainee could mail you the details if this is possible.

Please note that Prisoners Abroad will not call the Foreign and Commonwealth Office or any prison, to chase up whether money has been received or not.

The information provided in this factsheet is intended for information purposes only. It is not intended to constitute, nor does it constitute legal advice. Prisoners Abroad recommend that professional legal advice should always be sought. The information contained in this factsheet is subject to change and may not be up-to-date or accurate. Prisoners Abroad gives no warranty and makes no representation regarding the accuracy or completeness of the information provided. Prisoners Abroad will not be held responsible for any loss or damage arising from the use of the information provided.

If you spot any errors or inaccuracies in this factsheet please let us know by emailing [info@prisonersabroad.org.uk](mailto:info@prisonersabroad.org.uk). Thank you.

If you require this leaflet in a large print format, please contact us. Our details are below.

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