

Release Preparation Guide

Coming Home

Getting out of federal prison can be both exciting and stressful. Planning ahead can reduce anxiety and help to facilitate a smooth transition home.

From the beginning:

Planning for your return home from prison should ideally begin before leaving for prison. The opportunity for Voluntary Surrender makes this possible, but not everyone is able to surrender themselves. In such cases, after arriving at their designated BOP facility, inmates should consider some of the suggestions in the Voluntary Surrender Guide, as some will still be applicable.

Start saving money right away

- Shortly after arriving at their designated BOP facility, inmates are given a job assignment. While these jobs are typically very low-paying, some pay a decent amount by prison standards. Once you have purchased your initial necessities, begin saving as much as you can afford to. Even small amounts will add up over your time in prison and you will need as much money as possible when you are released.

Maintain a valid driver's license

- Having a valid driver's license when you are released will make your transition considerably smoother. If your driver's license will be expired by your release date, it may be possible to renew it through the mail. A loved one on the outside can look into your state's rules and help make preparations to get it renewed at the right time.

Be aware of your credit

- Inmates are ideal targets for identity thieves because of their isolation. Consider a credit freeze to protect you while you are away.
- Request a credit report well before your release so you have time to deal with any irregularities before you get home.

Use your time wisely

- Get your GED if you don't already have it.
- Enroll in classes offered through your facility's Education Department.
- Any certifications you can earn while in prison may help secure employment upon your release. Take advantage of any opportunities for vocational training.
- Earn a college degree through the mail from a reputable and accredited program.

When you're getting close:

Release preparation in the BOP typically begins around 18 months prior to your release date. Your facility will likely offer a variety of classes and events to help with your reentry. Your Case Manager will also begin meeting with you to discuss your plans for your post-release housing and employment.

Prepare your résumé

- If possible, include letters of reference from one or two former employers, coworkers, or close associates who can write about your positive qualities as a worker, acknowledge your criminal history without going into detail, and assert their belief that you have the ability to move past it.

Let people know

- Let your loved ones know that your release date is approaching and you will be looking for employment. Someone in a loved one's network might know of a possible work opportunity.

Social Security

- SSI benefits are suspended if you are incarcerated for more than 30 consecutive days but less than 12 months, and terminated if you are incarcerated for 12 months or longer. You must request to have your benefits reinstated upon your release and you must provide a copy of your release documents.
- If your BOP facility has a pre-release agreement with a local SSA office, your Case Manager might be able to help expedite the process so you can start receiving your benefits as soon as possible after your release.

Request your medical records

- You will want documentation to show to your doctors after your release.
- This will likely take some time so make the request far in advance.

Before you leave:

Every BOP facility will have its own standard release procedures. Talk to your Case Manager to ensure you are prepared and know what to expect.

Arrange transportation

- The BOP will provide you with transportation if necessary.
- If you are being picked up by a loved one, make sure they know when to arrive, where to go, and what to expect.

Release clothing

- The BOP will provide appropriate clothing for your release if necessary.
- You can have approved clothing mailed to the facility prior to your release date.

Mail property home

- If you want to take home more than you can physically carry, consider mailing the bulk of it home prior to your last day.

Change of address

- Make sure your loved ones know how to reach you after your release.
- Update any magazine subscriptions or other mail with your release address.

*** If you are releasing to a halfway house**

- Every halfway house has different rules and restrictions. Read your paperwork carefully to understand what is allowed.
- Stock up on approved commissary items you will need right away. It may be some time before you are allowed to go to a store.

Understand your restrictions

- Every federal district has its own set of rules for supervised release.
- Every state has its own set of rules for sex offender compliance.
- Understanding your restrictions will help you prepare for a successful transition home.

The day of your release:

On the day of your release you will report to R&D (Receiving and Discharge) to complete the required release steps. Procedures may vary at each facility but will include:

- Physical search (only if you are being released to the custody of law enforcement agents)
- Form completion
- Dress out (changing into your release clothes)
- Receipt of any prescription medication
- Receipt of funds, including the balance from your account and any transportation stipend deemed necessary
- Receipt of property, including any identification available
- Final clearance