



OLR RESEARCH REPORT

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ACCOMMODATIONS FOR INMATES WHO ARE HARD OF HEARING OR SIGHT IMPAIRED

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You asked what accommodations the Department of Correction (DOC) has for inmates who are hard of hearing or sight impaired.

SUMMARY

According to Wanda White-Lewis, Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) Director for the DOC, there are currently 7 deaf inmates and 4 blind inmates in DOC facilities.

Department of Correction Administrative Directive 10.19 (copy enclosed) sets out procedures for making reasonable accommodations for inmates with disabilities. It covers assistance devices for deaf, hard of hearing, blind, and visually impaired inmates.

According White-Lewis, each facility has an ADA Coordinator who is available to assist or answer questions for inmates with disabilities. In general, hard of hearing and visually impaired inmates are placed close to a correctional officer, whether in a dorm or block setting, to allow easy access to the officer.

Hard of hearing inmates are tested and provided with hearing aids if so indicated. They also have access to a teletypewriter (TTY) machine, a special phone device for hard of hearing people.

Sight impaired inmates may use a cane if needed. Also, they are allowed access to Braille materials.

Department of Correction Administrative Directives 9.6 and 10.19 (copies enclosed) set out procedures for challenging a decision on the grounds that DOC has failed to make reasonable accommodations. Approximately two to three appeals are filed every year.

ASSISTANCE DEVICES FOR HEARING OR VISUALLY IMPAIRED – DOC ADMINISTRATIVE DIRECTIVE 10.19

Inmates who may need accommodations are provided with an ADA -- Notice of Rights and Request for Reasonable Accommodations form. A request for reasonable accommodations is made by filling out the form or orally telling a staff person. Accommodations may differ based on the inmate's disability. In general, DOC must provide auxiliary aids and services to assist with educational, medical and administrative procedures.

Deaf and Hard of Hearing

Under DOC directive 10.19, devices for deaf and hard of hearing inmates that must be available as needed include:

1. TDD/TTY for telephone use (access to TDD/TTY must be equivalent to access to telephones by hearing inmates, except that additional time for each call is allotted because the assistance devices take more time to use);
2. amplified telephone handsets;
3. closed caption television;
4. sound amplification and assistive listening devices;
5. sound signals and flashing alarms;
6. visual smoke alarms;
7. hearing aids and batteries; and
8. qualified sign language interpreters.

Oral announcements and commands must be communicated to the deaf and hard of hearing in a manner that they can understand. Visual alarms or manual means of notifying deaf or hard of hearing inmates of emergencies or other events must be used when a deaf or hard of hearing inmate is in the facility.

Blind and Visually Impaired

Under DOC directive 10.19, devices for blind and visually impaired inmates that must be available as needed include:

1. large print books,
2. books on tape,
3. escorts during emergencies and other events,
4. orientation and inmate handbook in Braille or large print, and
5. canes.

APPEALING A DECISION REGARDING REASONABLE ACCOMMODATIONS

Department of Correction Administrative Directives 9.6 and 10.19 set out the procedures for appealing a decision regarding reasonable accommodations.

Under DOC Administrative Directive 9.6 and according to White-Lewis, the ADA Director receives the appeal, gathers facts from various parties and consults with the District Administrator. The ADA Director and District Administrator reach a decision together. This decision is final.

JB: ek