

## **Staff Hierarchy**

By Michael G. Santos  
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*This article describes the various positions within the Bureau of Prisons.*

### **Director:**

The Director of the Bureau of Prisons is a position appointed by the President. There have been relatively few Directors in the BOP's long history. I'll see if can name them from memory. The first, I think, was Sanford Bates. Then there was (first name unknown) Bennet. He was followed by Myrle Alexander. Then Norman Carlson. I came into the system under Carlson. After Carlson, there was J. Michael Quinlan. Quinlan's successor was Kathleen Hawk Sawyer, who was appointed during the first Bush presidency. She was replaced by Harley Lappin in 2006.

As Director of the Bureau of Prisons, Mr. Lappin is responsible for setting the policies that govern this large and growing bureaucracy. Although Mr. Lappin holds a Presidential appointment, his agency falls under the heels of the Executive Branch of Government's Department of Justice, which is led by the Attorney General. Accordingly, it's a political position. Do not expect to find incentives to encourage growth of good behavior in this conservative climate. And forget the word "rehabilitation" as a matter of policy, as prisoners will find no definition of this elusive term, and no incentive to achieve it.

### **Assistant Director:**

There are many Assistant Directors and Regional Directors of the Bureau of Prisons. As prisoners, we have very little access to these members of the BOP's executive staff. They create policies that have an impact on the lives of tens of thousands of prisoners, but as prisoners we have virtually no voice with these administrators.

## **Wardens:**

A warden, who acts in the role of the institution's Chief Executive Officer, governs most all institutions. Wardens make themselves available to prisoners through a process known as standing Mainline, or through practices known in the literature as Management by Walking Around. They are responsible for everything that goes on within their institution, but in recent years, wardens have had less discretion.

As a rapidly growing bureaucracy, the BOP strives for uniformity through the system. In the past, some Wardens were more tolerant than others were, offering prisoners in their institutions opportunities to have a role in the way they are governed. One Warden I knew used to say that Washington gave him a 20-million dollar budget, and he determined whether he would spend it on security measures or privileges according to how the prisoners in his institution behaved. Today's Wardens do not exercise as much discretion. Instead, all prisoners are being brought into a uniform compliance, one that is much more punitive than before. Wardens will oversee a large hierarchy of staff members, and delegate down the line. Prisoners will be expected to follow this chain of command when expressing grievances.

## **Associate Wardens:**

Except for the smallest institutions, prisons will have several Associate Wardens. They are responsible for overseeing the operations of various departments within their institutions. Prisoners may turn to them when they have a grievance, but ordinarily, Associate Wardens will expect prisoners to begin their grievance procedures a little lower on the prison's hierarchy of staff.

## **Department Heads:**

Department Heads report to their respective Associate Warden. You may think of an institution as a self-contained, miniature city. Its Custody Department, for example, is led by the Captain and is akin to a city's police department commissioner. Under the Captain are various

lieutenants, and under the lieutenants are the guards. In these days of political correctness, guards like to be called Correctional Officers, but it's unclear what type of correcting they do. There are many departments within each institution, and the Department Head is responsible for the operations within his or her respective department.

### **Unit Manager:**

The Unit Management Department, led by a Unit Manager, will prove the department head most accessible to each prisoner. The Unit Manager is like a mini-warden, responsible for the staff members and prisoners assigned to his housing unit. In Fort Dix, where I was confined when I wrote this article, each Unit Manager oversaw more than 700 prisoners and each Unit Team, which included Case managers and Counselors.

### **Case Manager:**

The Case Manager is the person whom the prisoner will approach when he has a question pertaining to his case, his custody and classification status, his release date, or to address factors outside the institution that are somehow related to his confinement. Since Case Managers have the immediate responsibility of overseeing the caseload of those prisoners under their care, they make themselves available for individual consultation with each prisoner on a regular basis. They are bureaucrats, however, and manage each individual case according to myriad guidelines and manuals; staff members in the BOP prefer the use of manuals to discretion and follow them assiduously.

### **Counselors:**

Counselors are responsible for a prisoner's job assignment, his housing assignment, the administration of approved telephone numbers, visiting lists, and package authorizations. The title notwithstanding, prisoners should not expect individual counseling from Counselors, Case Managers, or other BOP staff members.

## **Correctional Officers:**

The Correctional Officers conduct census counts several times each day, they hold the keys that lock the doors, they patrol the units and the compound like policemen patrolling a city block. Prisoners will have regular interaction with the guards, as the guards are responsible for conducting regular searches of the prisoners and their property, also, in institutions with controlled movements, prisoners must turn to the guards for passes that allow them to move from one area of the prison to another.

## **Detail Supervisors:**

Besides the regular guard force, each department employs several line staff members who oversee various aspects of the prison. For example, it employs people who run the plumbing department, the electrical department, the landscaping department, the food services department, etc. Each of these staff members has a cadre of inmates who are assigned to work for them. In each institution, the prisoners perform the actual labor that keeps the prison running. They cook the food, repair the plumbing, mow the lawns, paint the buildings, tend to electrical problems, and maintain the facilities. Staff members supervise the prisoners.

## **Medical Staff:**

Each prison also will employ various medical personnel to help the prisoners cope with their medical issues. A psychologist is usually available, too, to counsel prisoners experiencing depression or mental problems. Prisoners are wise to remember, however, that all staff members are considered correctional officers first; prisoners may expect to be suspected of malingering or telling lies whenever they speak with a staff member. Such suspicions come with the territory.