

**Specialized Housing Units in PADO**  
Michael D. Klopotoski, Deputy Secretary  
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## **Introduction**

Good afternoon House Judiciary Committee members. Thank you for this opportunity to offer testimony on specialized housing units in the Pennsylvania Department of Corrections

The Pennsylvania Department of Corrections remains committed to maintaining a safe and secure prison system for both the offender population and DOC staff. Recognizing the critical role a safe prison environment plays in the successful implementation of rehabilitative programs, the DOC utilizes special housing units as areas to house those offenders who, through their own demonstrated behavior, cannot function in the general population; thereby placing the safe prison environment in jeopardy. Among these specialized units are the Restricted Housing Unit (RHU), Special Management Unit (SMU), and Secure Special Needs Unit (SSNU). Each unit houses a specific category of offender. I will provide a brief description of each unit, to include the criteria for offender admission to each unit, the treatment provided, and the procedures involved for release from each of these specialized units.

### **Restricted Housing Unit (RHU):**

The primary purpose of a Restricted Housing Unit (RHU) is to securely house an offender who receives disciplinary sanctions, in accordance with Department policy DC-ADM 801, or who has been placed in Administrative Custody (AC) in accordance with DC-ADM 802. Those housed in AC status are placed for non-disciplinary reasons and whose presence in general population would constitute a threat to life, property, himself/herself, staff, other offenders, the public, or the secure and orderly running of the facility. These offenders require closer supervision and control than is generally available in general population. A general population offender may be assigned Administrative Custody (AC) status and placed in a Restricted Housing Unit by order of the Shift Commander. Whenever practical, written notice of the reasons for AC placement is given to the offender prior to placement, but in all cases within 24 hours after placement. An Administrative Hearing is conducted by the Program Review Committee (PRC) within seven workdays. A written summary of the hearing is prepared identifying the rationale for placement and a copy of the written hearing results is provided to the offender. A three tiered appeal process is available for the offender to appeal his/her placement in AC status. The Program Review Committee (PRC) reviews the status of each offender in AC status every seven days for the first two months. The Unit Management Team reviews the status of every offender in AC after 30 days and every 30 days thereafter. The PRC will interview every offender in AC status every 90 days unless the Unit Management Team recommends an earlier review. A qualified

psychologist or psychiatrist interviews and assesses an offender remaining in AC status for more than 30 calendar days. If the offender's confinement continues for an extended period, a mental health assessment is completed at a minimum of 90 calendar days. The Facility Manager or the PRC may release an inmate from AC status to general population at any time.

It is the policy of the Department to operate a disciplinary process that provides clear notice of prohibited behavior, outlines a fundamentally fair hearing process, establishes consistent sanctions for violations of Department rules and regulations, and identifies a process for offenders to appeal hearing results and sanctions. Every offender under the jurisdiction of the Department is expected to follow Department rules and regulations. If an offender violates Department rules and regulations, the violation shall be reported and disposed of through the hearing process. An offender may be placed in disciplinary custody (DC) and placed in an RHU as a sanction imposed by a Hearing Examiner, upon being found guilty of a Class I misconduct. The PRC interviews each offender in DC status every 90 days unless recommended for earlier review by the inmate's Unit Management Team. Early release from DC status may be considered based upon the nature of misconduct and recommendation from the Unit Team.

Due to the nature of RHU confinement and the limited time an offender is permitted to be out of his/her cell, it may be difficult, at times, to maintain the level of communication and interaction between staff and offenders that occurs in the general population units. In recognition of this, the DOC mandates that the RHU is visited by numerous staff, to include a medical doctor or physician assistant (PA), medical staff as required to distribute medication, conduct sick call, and other medical services on a daily basis, Chaplain, Corrections Counselor, psychology/psychiatry department staff, and other personnel as directed by the Facility Manager. In addition to these regular visits, staff assigned to the RHU communicate and interact with offenders as part of their routine rounds and duties. Verbal communications and personal interaction is critical to allow staff the opportunity to observe each offender's conduct, actions, reactions and interactions with others. Observations of this nature indicate not only how the individual offender is acting, but also gauges the tone and atmosphere of the unit. Simple changes in an offender's behavior can signal positive or negative adjustment, emotional/mental problems requiring psychological/psychiatric intervention, or be an indicator of tension.

Offenders housed in the Restricted Housing Units, whether in AC or DC status, interact daily with staff. Meals are delivered to the individual cells and are served by the unit's officers. RHU offenders are given the opportunity to exercise outside their cells in outside individual exercise units, one hour per day, five days a week. They are afforded the opportunity to shower and shave three times a week. Every offender is eligible for a haircut every 30 days. Laundry services are provided on a weekly basis. Each offender is provided a linen exchange once per week, a towel/jumpsuit exchange a minimum of twice per week and the offender's personal or state issued items are laundered at least once per week. The frequency of visits with family members for each RHU offender is determined by his/her custody status. Each offender housed in the RHU is provided the

opportunity to utilize the unit law library and he/she may request reading material from the institution library.

All facilities in the Department have an RHU with the exception of the boot camp. Approximately 5% of the total offender population is confined in an RHU.

**Special Management Unit (SMU):**

The primary purpose of a Special Management Unit (SMU) is to securely house an offender who exhibits behavior that is continually disruptive, violent and dangerous, or a threat to the orderly operation of his assigned facility. The offender may have been a repeated subject of disciplinary action or investigation. The unit is specifically designed to provide each offender with the opportunity to demonstrate a stable level of behavior so that he can be safely returned to general population or another suitable status. The overall goal of this program is to re-integrate these offenders back into general population. An offender confined in the SMU shall be given the opportunity to progress through specific programmatic phases within the SMU, based upon his behavior and ability to adjust under reduced levels of supervision. This program consists of five phases. Each phase offers progressively more privileges and services. Advancement through phases is based upon the offender meeting programmatic goals within that phase and his behavior. An offender received in DC status shall begin at Phase 5; an offender received in AC status shall begin at Phase 4. Phases 4 through 2 are each a minimum of three months in duration in order to deliver the appropriate programming; however, there is no maximum time limit in the phases.

As stated, phase 5 is the starting point for an offender in disciplinary custody. The offender remains in this phase until the expiration of his DC time or until the PRC grants him/her an early release from DC status. All offenders will receive the privileges and services, as defined by policy and consistent with their phase level.

Phase 4 is the starting point for an offender transferred to the SMU in AC status and an offender in Phase 5 who has completed his DC time or has his DC time set aside. These offenders will receive the privileges and services as defined by policy.

An offender enters phase 3 as he progresses through the program. An offender in this phase remains in AC status, but is eligible for increased privileges and services. In this phase, in cell, as well as out of cell programming is increased.

An offender in phase 2 remains in AC status. This is the first time that the offender is permitted out of his cell without restraints, individually or in small groups of no greater than four offenders. Privileges include group counseling, small group yard activities, educational classes, and block out for leisure time activities.

Phase 1 is a probationary period in general population in the offender's designated facility. This probationary period is a minimum of 90 days and may be extended to as long as 180 days by the Unit Management Team using the offender staffing review

process. An offender should be progressing through the management phases, with the goal of completing the program in two years.

Privileges, movement, visitation, and services within this unit are similar to those provided for offenders housed in the RHU. Privileges gradually increase as the offender progresses through the program.

Special Management Units are located at Camp Hill and Fayette with a total bed capacity of 74. The SMU population currently stands at 63. Over its 19 year operational period, the unit at Camp Hill has experienced a 63% program graduation rate. Only in operation for 42 months, Fayette's unit has graduated 30% from the program. Those offenders who make no progress in the program during the initial six to 12 months, or who demonstrate an unwillingness to succeed after 12 months, may be processed as program failures and returned to an RHU in AC or DC status. Based upon current needs, there is no SMU program available to the female offender population.

#### **Secure Special Needs Unit (SSNU):**

The Secure Special Needs Unit (SSNU) is designed to provide an offender, who has identified and significant mental health concerns with numerous Restricted Housing Unit (RHU) placements resulting in a substantial amount of Disciplinary Custody (DC) time, or a substantial extended Administrative Custody (AC) status, the opportunity of a specialized treatment program to assist him/her in returning to a general population Special Needs Unit (SNU) or other appropriate disposition. This program will treat an offender for a maximum of 18 months, unless extended by the SSNU Treatment Team. An offender who is unable to complete the program will be processed for alternative placement within the SSNU System, by review of the Central Office Special Needs/Psychiatric Review Team (COSN/PRT).

Placement in the SSNU may be based upon one or more of the following criteria:

1. a special needs offender housed in a Restricted Housing Unit (RHU) with significant accumulation of AC or DC time, who has a history of multiple admissions to an RHU, a Mental Health Unit (MHU), and/or the Forensic Treatment Center (FTC)
2. a pattern of inability to cope in general population or the SNU, which is a result of documented mental health concerns
3. aggressive behavior, and/or impulse control disorder
4. recommended by a Special Assessment Unit (SAU) evaluation
5. the offender is on the active MH/MR Tracking Roster (stability code C or D)

Once an offender has been approved for SSNU placement and is placed on the SSNU waiting list, the referring facility will immediately implement the following protocol for Enhanced Mental Health Services, which has been established for offenders on the SSNU waiting list.

The protocol is as follows:

- a. a weekly psychology contact is conducted, with documentation copied to the medical record
- b. additional psychological contacts, as needed
- c. monthly out-of-cell psychiatrist contacts
- d. weekly review by the PRC
- e. monthly PRT review; and
- f. continued weekly Correctional Counselor visits

The program components in the SSNU include a multidisciplinary treatment environment. The SSNU treatment program includes an Individual Treatment Plan (ITP) for each offender within a Phase. The ITP will reflect the specific goals and treatments to be used. It may include variations to the standard phases, treatment goals, length of time in a phase, and management of problematic behavior. The Psychology staff will update the ITP every 30 days while the offender is in Phases 5 through 1. The ITP shall be reviewed with the SSNU offender every 30 days. Participation in treatment programs is based on a phase system. The length of time spent in each phase is not fixed but depends on the offender's demonstrated level of adjustment.

Phase 5 is generally the starting point for an offender in the SSNU. An offender shall remain in this phase until appropriate staff has assessed him/her, his/her ITP has been developed and he/she has remained misconduct free for a sufficient period of time. An offender shall have privileges and activities as identified in policy and will be permitted basic personal hygiene items.

Phase 4 is the first phase in which the offender will be eligible for in-cell activity and individual treatment cell activity. Individual Treatment Cells are cells in the SSNU Group Room. This may include, but is not limited to, in-cell treatment, treatment cell sessions, and educational programming. The offender may also be eligible for increased privileges and property.

In phase 3 and with continued progress on meeting his/her SSNU ITP goals, an offender will be eligible for a combination of in-cell and out-of-cell activities, including, but not limited to: meals, treatment, activities, and education programming. During this phase, an offender will be able to attain additional personal property and he/she may be permitted to have on-unit employment.

More intensive treatment and programming are made available in phase 2, including increased out-of-cell activities. The SSNU Treatment Team, with input from the PRC, may review the offender for assignment to a double cell.

In phase 1, the offender is considered ready to begin reintegrating into a general population SNU setting. An offender who achieves phase 1 will be released from AC status and placed in the general population SNU or a step-down unit at the current treating facility or another SSNU facility. This phase will be 180 days in length. If an

offender successfully completes the 180 days without any significant incidents of behavioral or mental health regression, the SSNU Treatment Team will staff him/her for discharge from the program. Since the offender has completed the program, the Treatment Team may consider transferring him/her to another facility, or permit him/her to remain at the current facility. Secure Special Needs Units are located in the SCIs at Camp Hill, Cresson, Frackville, Graterford, Muncy, Pittsburgh, and Retreat. For the initial 6 month reporting period of this year, there have been 41 receptions, 20 phase graduations, 17 placements in Phase 1, and 4 program failures. The current population in these units is 84.

#### **Restricted Release List (RRL):**

The Facility Manager may request that an offender be placed on the Restricted Release List (RRL) when he/she poses a threat to the secure operation of the facility and where a transfer to another facility or jurisdiction would not alleviate the security concern. The Secretary must approve placing/removing an offender in or removal from this status. Offenders may be placed on the RRL due to assaultive history against staff or other offenders, sexual assault history, escape history, and overall threat to the security or orderly operation of the facility. Offenders on the RRL are considered as AC status and are housed in the RHU. There are currently 85 offenders throughout the department designated as Restricted Release cases. Once placed on the RRL, the offender is subject to Central Office review and approval prior to placement in general population.

#### **Conclusion:**

In closing, the DOC, in its continued commitment to operate safe and humane prisons, and to maintain the public safety, will utilize and assign appropriate offenders to specialized housing units. Though more costly to operate than general population units, (~16%) these units remain necessary to ensure our prisons are safe and secure for the public's safety and for the safety of the offender population that live there as well as the staff that work in our prisons. Whether these placements are for administrative or disciplinary reasons or for program placement, these units will continue to be operated by trained staff in accordance with existing policy. Placement in these units will not be arbitrary or capricious. Offender abuse in these or any unit will not be tolerated. Cases of alleged abuse will be investigated promptly by institutional staff or by the Office of Special Investigations and Intelligence. (OSII) It is my hope through the testimony offered today that the myths and misconceptions associated with specialized housing units have been dispelled. At this point, I welcome any questions you may have.