

# Michigan Department of Corrections Orientation Information

2026 Version



This document was created by the Michigan Department of Corrections (MDOC) to provide you with helpful information as your loved one begins their incarceration. This packet is not meant to answer every question you may have but will help you and your loved one with this transition by providing important information on how to remain connected, a basic overview of important aspects of operations, as well as key contacts and resources.

Additional information, including a more detailed Family Information Packet, can be found at [www.Michigan.gov/Corrections](http://www.Michigan.gov/Corrections).

## **Remaining Connected**

One of the most important ways you can support your loved one is to remain connected with them. This section will provide basic information about the ways in which you can remain connected throughout their term of incarceration.

At the intake stage, your loved one's options for communicating will be more limited and are discussed in the "What to Expect at Intake" section of this document.

### **US Mail**

Individuals within the MDOC may send and receive US Mail. The mail you send will be photocopied, with the copy being delivered to protect against the introduction of contraband. Stamps and envelopes for outbound mail must be purchased through the facility using the prisoner financial account system. Please review the MDOC mail policy, which can be found on the MDOC's website under the "Policies" section, where it is titled "05.03.118 Prisoner Mail" to understand what mailed items and contents are prohibited.

### **Phone Calls**

Individuals within the MDOC will have access to a prisoner phone system. All calls are placed from the prison as outbound calls (you cannot directly call your loved one). The amount of time each day that they will have access to phones will be dependent on their custody level and the movement schedule at their facility.

There is a cost to make phone calls, which is currently \$0.0735 per minute. You will need to place funds on your loved one's account for them to utilize the phones, except for one free 10-minute phone call each week. Information regarding placing funds on your loved one's account can be found in the "Financial Support For Your Loved One" section of this document.

Phone calls last for up to 15 minutes and multiple calls can be placed each day, depending on the demand and availability of phones.

If you are experiencing issues with the phone service, you can contact ViaPath at 855-466-2832.

### **Email (JPay)**

Individuals within the MDOC have access to a secure e-messaging system called JPay. Users must purchase electronic stamps to send messages, but messages are delivered electronically and can be saved on personal tablets or accessed through kiosks at each facility. JPay messages are subject to staff review and obscene, unlawful, or content that otherwise violates MDOC policy will be subject to rejection. More information can be found on the MDOC Policies page of the website.

Accounts can be established by visiting [www.jpayers.com](http://www.jpayers.com) and searching for your loved ones' facility.

If you are experiencing issues with the JPay service, you can contact the company at 800-574-

5729.

### In-Person Visits

Your loved one is allowed to visit with immediate family members, qualified clergy, attorneys, outreach volunteers and up to ten other people designated by them. Qualified visitors must be added by your loved one to their visiting list.

Once you have been added by your loved one to their visiting list, you will need to fill out an application to visit. This can be done online at **milogin.michigan.gov** or through the US mail. Step by step instructions on how to submit your visiting application are on [www.michigan.gov/corrections/for-families/visiting-a-prisoner](http://www.michigan.gov/corrections/for-families/visiting-a-prisoner)

Once approved to visit, you will need to pre-schedule your visits at <https://midoc.gtlvisitme.com/app>. You can schedule a visit up to 7 days in advance, but all visits must be scheduled at least 48 hours before the visit occurs. Additional information about visiting can be found at [www.michigan.gov/corrections/for-families/visiting-a-prisoner](http://www.michigan.gov/corrections/for-families/visiting-a-prisoner)

If you are experiencing issues scheduling a visit, you can contact ViaPath at 855-466-2832.

Prior to your first in-person visit, please review the MDOC's visiting standards, which can be located by searching for "Visiting Standards" on the MDOC website. Please pay particular attention to the visiting dress code, allowable property, and visiting room operations. You may bring money (up to \$30 per person) if you'd like to purchase vending items in the visiting room using a vending debit card. Vending cards can be obtained at the facility.

### Video Calls

Every MDOC facility has equipment that allows for video calls to occur during scheduled times. These video calls must be scheduled in advance, using the same website that is used for in-person visits (<https://midoc.gtlvisitme.com/app>). These calls currently cost \$3.20 for a 20-minute call.

If you experience issues related to a video call, you can contact ViaPath at 855-466-2832.

If you face technology barriers to establishing in-person visits or video calls online, you can contact the Family Participation Program Helpline at 269-339-0606 for free assistance with establishing accounts. The Family Participation Program cannot provide direct financial assistance to families to pay for the cost of calls or visits.

### **What to Expect at Intake**

Your loved one is currently going through an intake process as their first step with the MDOC. This process will generally take between two and four months, during which they will be treated as being in "quarantine". In this status, they will have limited movement within the facility and their day will be spent meeting with various professionals, such as healthcare staff. There will be limited time out of cell each day for meals, limited recreation, and phone calls. During this stage, you will not be able to visit them in person. Additionally, your loved one will not be able to receive a "Friends and Family" package while going through the intake process.

Intake will include a full physical and mental health assessment, verification of educational history, screening for various programming options, and initial classification within the MDOC. Your loved one can receive and send mail while at intake and can make limited phone calls if you have placed money on their account. The mailing address can be found by searching for your loved one on the Offender Tracking Information System (OTIS) website at [www.michigan.gov/corrections/otis](http://www.michigan.gov/corrections/otis).

At intake, your loved one will receive one stamp and envelope to write an initial letter but will then become responsible for the cost of communication (stamps, telephones, JPay). There may be a delay in written communication as your loved one purchases stamps and envelopes, which is why it is important that you establish multiple options for communication.

During this stage, it is important that families also prepare for incarceration. That includes establishing a phone account and placing funds on the account, providing initial financial support by placing money on your loved one's financial account if you choose to do so, and contacting entities such as Friend of the Court if support orders need to be changed or the Department of Health and Human Services if your family needs assistance due to your loved one's incarceration.

MDHHS Assistance Programs – [www.michigan.gov/mdhhs/assistance-programs](http://www.michigan.gov/mdhhs/assistance-programs)

Friend of the Court – 877-543-2660

The DHHS link above offers resources for various support programs that may not only aid individuals upon reentry from incarceration, but also their families during the period of incarceration. These programs include Cash Assistance through the Family Independence Program and State Disability Assistance, Food Assistance (SNAP) for nutritional support, Medicaid for health coverage, the Women, Infants & Children (WIC) nutrition program, Child Care Assistance, Emergency Relief for utilities, home repairs, and burials, as well as Housing and Homeless Services. If your family financial situation is impacted by the incarceration of your loved one please utilize the link or MDHHS's MI Bridges online portal to apply for benefits and explore resources.

### **Financial Support for Your Loved One**

If you would like to support your loved one financially, you can do so by depositing funds into their electronic trust account. No actual money is used in prison, but your loved one will be able to use this account to make purchases through the prisoner commissary/store and other approved vendors. Items available for purchase include food items, personal care items, electronic devices such as TV's, as well as certain personal clothing items. The maximum amount of items that can be purchased from the prisoner store every other week is \$125 (plus applicable sales tax).

You can place funds in your loved one's account by visiting <https://web.connectnetwork.com>.

Each quarter, a “Friends and Family” package may be sent from the approved vendor by you or someone else in the community (only one package per quarter may be sent, regardless of the number of potential senders or size of the order, which has a maximum of value of \$125).

Packages can be ordered by visiting [www.accesscatalog.com](http://www.accesscatalog.com).

PLEASE NOTE: YOU SHOULD NEVER MAKE PAYMENTS TO ANYONE ELSE IN THE MDOC, TO ANYONE IN THE COMMUNITY ON BEHALF OF YOUR LOVED ONE OR USE SERVICES SUCH AS CASH APP AT THE DIRECTION OF YOUR LOVED ONE, ANOTHER PRISONER, OR THEIR FAMILIES. SUCH ACTIVITIES, INCLUDING THE EXTORTION OF PRISONERS FOR PAYMENT, ARE A DIRECT VIOLATION OF MDOC POLICY AND MAY BE A VIOLATION OF CRIMINAL LAW. ENGAGING IN CRIMINAL ENTERPRISE WITHIN PRISON OR ON BEHALF OF ANYONE IN PRISON, INCLUDING THE PURCHASE OR SMUGGLING OF DRUGS CAN RESULT IN A LOSS OF VISITS AND POTENTIAL CRIMINAL CONVICTION, SO SUCH ACTIVITY SHOULD BE PROMPTLY REPORTED TO THE MDOC.

### **Property**

The MDOC provides necessary state-issued items to each person entering the MDOC. This includes undergarments, uniforms, shoes, coats, blankets, bed linens, and towels. Your loved one may purchase additional allowable personal clothing items, including additional shoes, from an approved vendor.

The MDOC does not provide electronic devices, such as TVs, but these can be purchased by prisoners from approved vendors. Cable television service is purchased by each facility’s Prisoner Benefit Fund, a fund supported by certain prisoner and family purchases such as commissary and vending machine purchases.

All property must be purchased from an approved vendor (it cannot be dropped off at the facility by family) and except for the television, each item must have a value of less than \$75.

You may also purchase books ***(Soft Cover Only Effective 02/09/206)*** and publications from approved vendors that will be sent directly from the vendor to the prison. The approved vendors are Amazon, Barnes and Noble, Edward R. Hamilton, Prison Legal News, Schuler Books, and Walmart.com. Only new books/publications can be purchased from these vendors (**no other items**) and they must be shipped directly from one of these vendors, not an affiliate seller.

Your loved one will be responsible for safeguarding their property against theft, damage, or misuse. It is very important that your loved one keep receipts for all property in case there is a claim that property was damaged or lost.

### **Classification and Placement within the MDOC**

Starting at intake, an initial classification screening will occur to determine an appropriate custody level. This will help determine which facility your loved one will be placed at, as well as the structure of their day and access to certain activities or programs, with more opportunities being available in lower custody levels. Over time, this classification will change, based on positive factors (periods of time without misconducts, completion of certain programs, etc.) or negative factors (misconducts, etc.). The length of time that must be served prior to parole consideration is also a factor in placement.

As your loved one completes their sentence, they will reside in units with individuals with varying criminal histories and convictions, but all will have been screened and approved to reside at that custody level.

Classification will be an important factor in determining which facility your loved one will reside at, in addition to factors such as the availability of physical and mental healthcare based on their level of needed care, and access to certain recommended programs. The MDOC's prisons are not interchangeable, and individuals are not housed based on where their crime occurred or where they lived prior to going to prison. While this can create challenges for families, it is important that your loved one is at a facility that can meet their classification, healthcare, programming, and educational needs throughout their incarceration.

### **Facility Structure**

Each facility is overseen by a Warden, who manages an administrative team made up of at least one Deputy Warden and one Assistant Deputy Warden. This administrative team oversees all operations within the facility. Custody staff include Officers, Sergeants, Lieutenants, and Captains, in that order of increasing seniority. Non-custody operations include functions such as Prison Counselors that handle non-custody issues in the housing units, Healthcare, Education, Food Service, Physical Plant, and the Business Operations of the facility.

When contacting the facility, please let staff know what you need assistance with. They will help direct you to the appropriate staff that can review your request. Please allow staff sufficient time to respond, rather than seeking answers from additional staff who may not be responsible for that area.

### **Core Programming**

During the intake process, your loved one will complete various assessments to help determine areas of potential need that can be addressed through Interventions to reduce their risk of reoffending in the future. Areas of need may include Core Cognitive Interventions to address criminal thinking (e.g. Core Cognitive Interventions (CCI), the use of Violence (Violence Prevention Intervention-VPI).

Programming recommendations will be created in the MDOC's management system and are

tracked on a statewide basis. Core programming is offered as soon as resources are available, based on an individual's earliest release date. An individual with a short initial sentence will often start programming within just a few months of entering prison, while someone with a longer sentence will generally be placed on a waitlist and will start later in the term of incarceration. These waitlists are tracked centrally, and programs are enrolled based on the potential participant's earliest release date.

If your loved one has been placed on a programming waitlist, they will not need to request to be placed in the program, as that will occur automatically when they reach the top of the waitlist. While waiting, it is important that they avoid misconducts or other activities that could impact their classification. Some programs are available only in Levels I and II, while others are available at all levels. Being classified to Level I or II increases the number of facilities where an individual can be placed to complete programming.

### **Education**

A key element of the MDOC's operation is the education programs it provides. If your loved one does not have a verified high school diploma or equivalency, they will receive a recommendation to participate in academic programming. Depending on factors such as age and the length of their sentence, they may be enrolled shortly after leaving intake or may be placed on a waitlist to start academic programming in the future.

If your loved one has a high school diploma or high school equivalency (including one earned within the MDOC), they can be considered for a Career and Technical Education Program (CTE) or a Post-Secondary Program. The vocational counseling process will assist them in making this decision and expressing interest in these programs. CTE programs are generally completed in the final 18 months of incarceration so that practical skills remain strong until release, while post-secondary classes can be started at any time once a prospective student is selected by one of the MDOC's post-secondary partners.

For these types of programs, it is important that individuals not receive misconducts, which may result in them being screened out for participation and that they have a classification of Level I or II, where these programs are offered.

More information can be obtained about educational programs on the MDOC's website.

### **Vital Documents**

The MDOC assists everyone with applying for vital documents, with the Department paying the cost. These documents will be made available on the day of release to individuals who have agreed to complete these applications.

If you have copies of your loved one's vital documents, please store them in a safe place and let them know where they will be post-release.

## **Leisure Time/ Volunteer Programs**

Each facility will offer different leisure time or volunteer-led programs. These are generally managed by the facility, with more opportunities available to those in lower custody levels. Examples of these programs include Gardening, Dog Training, Religious Activities, Creative Arts Workshops, Recovery Groups (AA/NA), etc.

## **Healthcare**

During incarceration, individuals have access to physical and mental health services. Initial assessments will occur at intake and an annual screening appointment with healthcare will occur each year. If there is a healthcare need between these screenings, individuals can contact healthcare (kite) via a mailbox in their housing unit to request to be seen. Certain appointments will result in a \$5 copayment.

Your loved one will work with healthcare staff to create a care plan if they have health issues. This will include establishing a schedule for appointments to address chronic conditions, completing necessary labs or tests, and obtaining prescriptions. These prescriptions may or may not be the same as the medications they took prior to incarceration but will be prescribed by the medical professionals overseeing their care. The MDOC will also work to promote overall healthy lifestyle choices, such as access to smoking cessation supports.

While an initial mental health assessment will occur at intake, your loved one should contact healthcare if there is any change in their mental health, particularly if they have any thoughts of self-harm. The MDOC provides mental health at various levels of care, including outpatient, residential, and crisis stabilization.

Healthcare staff also manage the MDOC's Medication Assisted Treatment program, which may be available for prisoners who have been screened and approved by healthcare. More information will be provided to your loved one at their facility.

If you have questions about healthcare, you can contact the Bureau of Healthcare Services at 517-335-2263 or [bhcs-communications@michigan.gov](mailto:bhcs-communications@michigan.gov).

## **Healthcare Release of Information**

Your loved one maintains autonomy over their healthcare, including the decision of who to share health information with. While the MDOC will contact an emergency contact in the case of a health emergency, the Department cannot release health information, including to a family member, without a signed release from the patient.

Healthcare releases are available during intake, at annual check-ups and at any time by making a request to healthcare staff. Verbal releases can remain valid for the entire term of incarceration or for a shorter period, such as a year, depending on what the patient chooses. Without a release, the MDOC cannot share information about your loved one's health or

treatments with you

### **Reentry**

Most people entering prison will return to their family and their community. As a result, it is not too early to think about what it will take to support a successful reentry. The MDOC and its partners will assist with certain needs, like helping to find work or temporary stable housing in the periods immediately after release.

Strong family and community support can also be a key element of successful reentry. While families are often excited about their loved ones' return, it can create very real tensions. It is important that once your loved one has found some stability with their incarceration that you talk openly and honestly about plans and expectations for reentry. Questions like, "Will the person return to their past home, live with someone else, or seek temporary housing upon release?" are best answered well in advance of parole consideration. Similarly, families should also think deeply about how to best support an individual returning from prison, which may require a different approach compared to prior to incarceration.

### **Things to Avoid in Prison**

It is important that your loved one focuses on completing their term of incarceration successfully with the goal of paroling when initially eligible. To support this goal, it is important to do the following:

1. Avoid drugs, the creation or holding of weapons, gambling, or other criminal conduct within the prison.
2. Do not make any purchases or agreements on "credit". Even if another incarcerated individual appears friendly, it is important to avoid any form of debt while incarcerated.
3. Report attempts on extortion or other threats to appropriate staff so they can be investigated.
4. Avoid making any payments to other incarcerated individuals or their connections in the community. Making these payments will signal that your loved one is a potential target for extortion.

### **MDOC Family Advisory Board**

To help support its operations and interactions with the families of incarcerated individuals, the MDOC supports a Family Advisory Board. This Board makes recommendations related to family reunification programming and opportunities, as well as serving as a body that provides feedback to the MDOC related to the experiences of family members. If you have interest in potentially being selected to serve on this board, you can complete an application on the MDOC's website