PAN Self-Advocacy Routes of Release Related to COVID-19

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Your Responsibility in Using These Guides

PAN’s COVID-19 Guides are not intended to give legal advice, but rather general legal information. No attorney-client relationship is created by using any information in this guide. You should consult an attorney for legal advice specific to your situation. When putting PAN’s COVID-19 Guides together, we did our best to give you useful and accurate information because we know that people who are currently or formerly incarcerated often have difficulty getting legal information. However, the laws change frequently and are subject to differing interpretations. If you use this information, it is your responsibility to make sure that the law has not changed, and applies to your particular situation. This guide was produced along with additional materials about COVID-19 in CDCR that people outside can download and mail to you, including: PAN Guide to Administrative Appeals For COVID-19 (Short Version); PAN Guide to Administrative Appeals For COVID-19 (Long Version); and, How To Draft Declarations to Support Requests Related to COVID-19. You can write to the Prison Law Office office@prisonlaw.com General Delivery, San Quentin, CA 94964 for a California State Habeas Corpus Manual; a manual on California State Petition of Writ of Mandate; a Federal Habeas Corpus Manual; a Lawsuits for Money Damages Against Prison Officials Manual; as well as a guide specifically on Requesting CDCR Records.

What is Covered in this Guide

This Guide covers the following routes to raise a claim related to Covid-19 in the courts:

- Why Plata/Coleman are unlikely to lead to release
- California Penal Code §1170(d)(1) Criminal Resentencing in Superior Court
- A petition for writ of habeas corpus in state court
- A petition for writ of mandamus in state court
- A petition for writ of habeas corpus in federal court
- A civil rights claim under 42 U.S.C. Sect. 1983 in federal court
- Why other options are not likely to lead to release due to COVID-19

Why Plata/Coleman Unlikely to Lead to Release

On March 25, 2020, attorneys from the Prison Law Office (PLO) and the law firm of Rosen, Bien, Galvan, & Grunfeld (RBGG) filed an emergency motion in the Coleman v. Newsom and
Plata v. Newsom, overcrowding lawsuits asking for release. On April 17, Judge Tigar held that the COVID-19 policies that the state presented to the court were, for now, constitutionally adequate so no releases would be ordered through this case yet, or likely ever. The court noted that it believes that the government has the ability to take additional steps to decrease the risk of spreading the disease, and noted it would continue to oversee the state’s response. The court also indicated that it may find CDCR’s response “deliberately indifferent” and therefore unconstitutional if circumstances change in the future. Because of the April 17th court order saying that the state’s COVID policies were thus far constitutional, it is more important than ever to make a record showing that the policies CDCR claims are in place are not actually in place or were so delayed to be meaningless or physically harmful to you. If CDCR is proven to have failed to implement its policies, that could be a basis for your release. You are the one who will need to provide the proof that CDCR’s practices are different than the policies it claims to have implemented. If you create the paper trail that proves this, the judge may change his mind.

Potential Routes to Release or Relief Due to COVID

There are many different routes to seek relief relating to COVID-19 in addition to the routes covered in this guide. Below is a brief summary of some of the other routes to relief that you may consider outside of filing a lawsuit against CDCR. Due to the emergency nature of COVID-19 people are filing emergency suits in various kinds of courts, styled as various kinds of cases, or combining traditionally separate case types into one case. You have a few options, and each corresponds to a different court form. The form and documents you attach to it need to contain all information that the court needs to rule in your favor in a well-organized way so that it is easy to follow, and without overloading the court with information that is not really relevant to the issue you are raising. The enclosed documents should help you figure out what is most relevant for COVID-19.

California Penal Code §1170(d)(1) Criminal Resentencing in Superior Court

Penal Code § 1170(d)(1) authorizes a court to recall a sentence and resentence a person to a lesser sentence either: (1) on the court’s own motion within 120 days after sentencing, or (2) at any time upon a recommendation from the CDCR, the Board of Parole Hearings (BPH), the District Attorney, or the County Correctional Administrator (typically the Sheriff). CDCR or the DA can send a referral letter to a trial court to give the judge the authority to recall the sentence of someone who is currently incarcerated to be resentenced “anew.” An 1170(d)(1) referral would go to the court corresponding to location of your county of conviction (not where you were sentenced). In the past, CDCR and the courts have been reluctant to consider people’s efforts to ask for consideration directly, and instead preferred to allow CDCR or the DA to initiate the referral. Given COVID-19 it is worth asking any custody or medical staff you know to try to make
a referral to the Warden, Director of Adult Institutions, and Secretary Diaz for you. Defense attorneys have had some luck contacting CDCR and DAs to present a package of paperwork requesting “exceptional conduct” consideration. Now is a good time to contact your criminal attorney about this, especially because the statute requires the court to consider advanced age and diminished physical condition, two COVID-19 risk factors. The Ella Baker Center’s guide has more information about the various categories CDCR has considered, which include exceptional conduct: Back to Court: a Resentencing Guide for the Fair and Just Sentencing Reform Act (SB 1393) and PC 1170(d)(1). The Office of Administrative Law’s website has the temporary CDCR rules.

Alternate paragraph on 1170 [needs to be combined with para. Above]

P.C. 1170(d)(1) empowers CDCR and DAs to petition sentencing judges for resentencing: “The court may consider postconviction factors, including, but not limited to, the inmate’s disciplinary record and record of rehabilitation while incarcerated, evidence that reflects whether age, time served, and diminished physical condition, if any, have reduced the inmate's risk for future violence, and evidence that reflects that circumstances have changed since the inmate’s original sentencing so that the inmate’s continued incarceration is no longer in the interest of justice.”

There is no indication CDCR or DAs will use this process. When contacted, CDCR indicated the process is too slow for COVID relief, even when courts were operating on a normal basis. That is, of course, not even considering delays caused by court rules limiting review of criminal matters due to COVID already slowing resentencing motions pending before covid. Though COVID-19 appears to be an ideal circumstance for CDCR and District Attorneys to seek judicial evaluation for release because the COVID-19 risk factors align with the statute’s factors, including someone’s advanced age, diminished physical condition, this power is not being used in a timely fashion, if at all.

Contacts

- Emily at Ella Baker Center to see if you are already on CDCR’s referral list, and to get on their mailing list for updates - 1419 34th Ave #202, Oakland, CA 94601 (510) 428-3939 emily@ellabakercenter.org.
- Stanford Three Strikes Project is also working on some cases Michael Romano, (650) 736 - 8670, mromano@stanford.edu; Susan Champion, (650)736 - 7757, schampion@law.stanford.edu; Milena Blake, milenab@stanford.edu; Crown Quadrangle, 559 Nathan Abbott Way Stanford, CA 94305-8610.
Commutation Requests to Governor Newsom

According to [https://www.gov.ca.gov/commutations/](https://www.gov.ca.gov/commutations/), people who have been convicted of a crime and are currently serving their sentence in California may apply for a commutation (reduction of sentence). The Board of Parole Hearings (BPH) investigates commutation applications. In deciding whether to grant a commutation, the BPH considers:

- the impact of a commutation on the community, including whether the grant is consistent with public safety and in the interests of justice;
- the age and circumstances of the offense and the sentence imposed, and the age of the applicant at the time;
- the applicant’s self-development and conduct since the offense, including whether the applicant has made use of available rehabilitative programs and has identified and addressed treatment needs;
- the applicant’s need for a commutation; and
- the applicant’s plans upon release from custody.

To apply for commutation for the first time or for the first time in three years, you must submit a Commutation Application to the Governor’s Office. You may submit additional information or copies of relevant documents in support of your application, such as letters of support or certificates of achievement. Do not send original documents because application materials will not be returned. You must also submit completed Notice of Intent to Apply for Clemency to the district attorney in the county of the conviction for your commitment offense; and submit an authorization for release of medical information (form 7385) if you are applying for a commutation because you are suffering from a terminal illness or have a severe and chronic disability that would be substantially mitigated by release from prison or reduction of sentence. If you submitted a commutation application in the last three years and would like Governor Newsom to re-open your prior application and consider it, you may submit a Reapplication for Clemency. These forms are available at [https://www.gov.ca.gov/clemency/](https://www.gov.ca.gov/clemency/). CCWP’s guide to commutation is here [https://droplwop.com/commutations-application-guide/](https://droplwop.com/commutations-application-guide/).
Governor Newsom indicated he will not grant mass commutation. Though the California Governor enjoys wide discretion to grant executive clemency in the form of commutations that substitute a less severe punishment for that imposed by the court, the process is slow and may require DA, and at times judicial review. California Constitution Cal. Const. art. V, § 8; Cal. Penal Code § 4800. The governor may not grant clemency to a person twice convicted of a felony without first obtaining a recommendation from the California Supreme Court, but the standard for that recommendation is only a determination that “the applicant’s claim has sufficient support that an act of executive clemency, should the Governor choose to grant it, would not represent an abuse of power.” “Procedure for Considering Requests for Recommendations Concerning Applications for Pardon or Commutation,” Admin. Order 2018-03-28, (Cal. 2018); See also, e.g., See Cal. Penal Code § 4853. Cal. Penal Code § 4802.05.

Contact: Governor Gavin Newsom State Capitol, 1303 10th St., Suite 1173, Sacramento, CA 95814. kelli.evans@gov.ca.gov, eliza.hersh@gov.ca.gov.

File Emergency 602 & 602HC and Seek Release through a Writ of Habeas Corpus

If you are medically high risk and/or are set to be released soon, file a 602 and 602HC seeking early release. If you believe that you are medically high risk because you have underlying health conditions such as diabetes, hypertension, respiratory illness, or cardiovascular disease, and/or are elderly (over 50), prepare a record identify yourself by filing a 602 seeking early release due to risk of COVID-19. List all medical conditions that make you high risk and attach any recent medical records documenting your conditions. State clearly: **I am not adequately protected from a coronavirus infection at this facility because** (describe the conditions that threaten you with infection, such as inadequate sanitation of facility or availability of soap, disinfectant, or hand washing facilities; inadequate isolation of symptomatic people; inadequate quarantine of exposed persons; inadequate exclusion of symptomatic or exposed staff, contractors or volunteers, inadequate testing and reporting, or inadequate health care for the infected.)
A petition for writ of mandamus in state court

Paste summary, relevant forms, and relevant addresses and contact information from self help litigation guide.

A petition for writ of habeas corpus in federal court

Paste summary, relevant forms, and relevant addresses and contact information from self help litigation guide.

A civil rights claim under 42 U.S.C. Sect. 1983 in federal court

Paste summary, relevant forms, and relevant addresses and contact information from self help litigation guide.

Why Other Release Mechanisms Are Likely Unavailable or too Delayed to Be Effective

What follows are summaries of established paths for relief, however they are likely not meaningfully available to many people, or in the timeline needed to save lives.

CDCR Has Not Indicated It Will Further Use Its California Government Code Section 8658 Emergency Release Powers To Release People

Section 8658 of the California Government Code provides CDCR with authority to release people in the case of emergencies like today’s pandemic: “In any case in which an emergency endangering the lives of inmates of a state, county, or city penal or correctional institution has occurred or is imminent, the person in charge of the institution may remove the inmates from the institution. Cal. Govt. Code § 8658. He shall, if possible, remove them to a safe and convenient place and there confine them as long as may be necessary to avoid the danger, or, if that is not possible, may release them. Such person shall not be held liable, civilly or criminally, for acts performed pursuant to this section. Under this law, the State shall, when possible, ensure that people held in custody be provided safe harbor as needed to avoid emergency.” State law recognizes that the dangers involved in keeping people incarcerated in an emergency. However, CDCR Secretary Diaz indicated he would only be using this power for the small group of 3,500 people convicted offenses the penal code designate as non-violent, and whom were already scheduled for release within 60 days. These releases are completed. There is no indication Diaz will use this power again unless ordered to.

The CDCR Secretary has authority to order temporary removal from prison under Cal. Pen. Code § 2690 at the discretion of the court, upon a finding of good cause in an affidavit by the requesting peace officer stating that the law enforcement purpose is legitimate and necessary. Here despite the purpose being legitimate and necessary and the facts establishing good cause, CDCR has not indicated it will use its authority.

Compassionate Release Sentence Recall Criteria Are Too Difficult to Meet

Under California law, the State can provide compassionate release for people not sentenced to LWOP or death who have serious medical conditions or who are elderly through three separate laws: recall of sentence, medical parole, and elderly parole. Existing law (notably due to COVID-19 the legislature has not been not in session to amend the law) limits eligibility to people who are: (1) terminally ill with an incurable condition that will lead to death within six months, as verified by a CDCR doctor’s notation in medical records; or (2) permanently medically incapacitated with a medical condition that renders them permanently unable to perform activities of basic daily living; and (3) do not pose a threat to public safety. Penal Code § 1170(e)(1) and (2); 15 CCR § 3076(b). Furthermore, CDCR has 30 days to complete the process, then submit to the sentencing court (which must hold a hearing within 10 days when court is operating normally) or BPH (which has until the next monthly meeting to decide) which is too long given the COVID-19 timeline, and that courts are limiting scheduled matters due to COVID-19. 15 CCR §§ 3076.34; see also Penal Code § 1170(e).

Medical Parole Criteria Are Too Difficult to Meet

Individuals not sentenced to LWOP or death may request medical parole by getting CDCR medical staff to document that they are permanently medically incapacitated through a condition that did not exist at time of sentence and that they require full time nursing care. In non-COVID times the Parole Board would hold a hearing to evaluate whether there is a threat to public safety. However, this is not a good option for COVID-19 because medical staff must take the time to perform a eligibility assessment using a tool called Resource Utilization Guide IV (RUG IV) and if they deem the person qualified, then the Chief Medical Executive and Warden or Chief Deputy must approve before forwarding the case to the Parole Board, which then decides whether to release. Cal. Penal Code § 1170(e). Due to COVID these steps will be delayed or unavailable at a moment where time is of the essence. Furthermore due to the high risk of
spreading COVID in nursing care facilities and the track records of large amounts of deaths in them, it appears unlikely that nursing facilities would accept patients released from CDCR.

Elderly Parole Criteria Are Too Difficult to Meet to Grant the Wide Relief Needed and CDCR Medical Staff and BPH Staff Are Too Busy To Complete the Paperwork and Hold the Proceedings

Only the small group of people who are both 60 years of age and served 25 years of continuous incarceration on the current sentence (not sentenced to death, LWOP, first-degree murder of a peace officer, or under California’s Three Strikes law) are eligible, and only if the Parole Board finds the individual is not a public safety threat. These proceedings were already scheduled before COVID and not many people will now become eligible because of the incredibly long sentence requirements.

Alternative Custody Program is Suspended Due to COVID-19

CDCR’s COVID-19 website notes it suspended transfers “into the Male Community Reentry Program (MCRP), the Custody to Community Transitional Reentry Program (CCTRP), and the Alternative Custody Program (ACP)....CDCR has limited transfers of inmates into the Conservation Camp Program.” Thus, this is not an option. Typically someone with no more than 12 months and no less than 45 days of state prison sentence left to serve may request Alternative Custody Program placement. (15 CCR § 3078.2(b).) The program excludes people with convictions for a serious or violent felony, a current or prior conviction that requires sex offender registration, a history of escape within the past 10 years, or be deemed at high risk of committing a violent offense. (Penal Code § 1170.05(d); 15 CCR § 3078.2(c); 15 CCR § 3078.3(a).) The CDCR rules also excludes people for other reasons including an active or potential criminal or immigration hold, an active restraining order, Level A-1 through Level C in-prison misconduct in the last 24 months (except for possession of alcohol), validation as an active or inactive STG-I member or associate, current close or max custody status, and SHU or PSU placement in the last 12 months. (15 CCR § 3078.2(c); 15 CCR § 3078.3(a).)
What You Can Do Now

- **Build a Record**: The record you build will support with for any route of advocacy you may take. Make notes of what is happening at your facility; gather medical records and other evidence of your conditions; reach out to loved ones to build a parole plan, which is an important part of any request for release.

- **File a 602 if adequate precautions are not taken within your facility**: CDCR has said it will follow its typical protocol for influenza (flu) outbreaks, which includes isolation of people with symptoms and separate quarantines of others who are exposed to those with symptoms. File a 602 or a Group 602-G if precautions are not taken around you, including: Provision of adequate soap and disinfectant free to all incarcerated persons; distribution of double the amount of soap; provision of hand sanitizer when hand washing facilities are not available; sanitation of high-touch surfaces throughout the facility including phones, counters, tables, eating surfaces, doorknobs, faucets, and all bathroom surfaces. Bathrooms should be sanitized three times a day.

- **Update your forms on file with CDCR** about who you want to be involved in your medical care and how you want them to be involved. Mail copies of the various forms below and share with whomever you authorize for release of information and decision-making on your behalf.
  
  - **Health Record Authorization Release Form 7385** gives someone outside the ability to get information about you from CDCR’s California Correctional Health Care Services (CCHCS), including access to your medical and custody records and the ability to speak with someone at the prison about your health via phone calls, emails, or faxes with this information.
  
  - **CDCR 7421 Advance Directive** is a document that allows you to write your wishes about end-of-life care. It allows you to say what you want so that family, friends, doctors, nurses, and other health care staff will know for sure what you want if you can no longer speak for yourself (for example: “I don’t want CPR (to be revived) or a breathing machine if my heart stops or I cannot breathe on my own. If I cannot eat on my own, a feeding tube is okay.”). It also allows you to name someone as your Medical Decision-Maker to make health care choices for you if there comes a time when you cannot physically advocate for yourself. They can tell others about your wishes for treatment at the end of life and make sure they are followed.

  - The Advance Directive is NOT a “Will” and has NOTHING to do with your possessions or assets inside or outside of prison.

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● Please note: PAN/your PAN advocate cannot serve as a Medical Decision-Maker on your behalf.

  ○ CDCR 7465 POLST is short for Physicians Orders for Life Sustaining Treatment. This form is in addition to form CDCR 7421 Advance Directive form. The POLST is a form used by all hospitals in California (and other states) and is used to write a patient’s wishes about end-of-life care. Ask your counselor or health care provider for one.

Where to send requests for release due to COVID-19 (via LEGAL MAIL)

- CDCR’s COVID-19 response team. [COVID19@cdcr.ca.gov](mailto:COVID19@cdcr.ca.gov)
- J. Clark Kelso, Federal Medical Receiver (916) 739-7000  ckelso@pacific.edu
- Ralph Diaz, Secretary for CDCR (916) 324-7308 — press 4 ralph.diaz@cdcr.ca.gov
- Diana Toche, Undersecretary - Health Care Services diana.toche@cdcr.ca.gov
- Connie Gipson, Director, Division of Adult Institutions connie.gipson@cdcr.ca.gov
- If people have gone before the board and were found suitable, contact BPH and Governor to ask for expedited release Jennifer.Shaffer@cdcr.ca.gov
- Write and call the [medical department at the prison](mailto:)
- Reach out to the [Ombudsman](mailto:) assigned to prison.
- Ask a lawyer who is available to help or already working with you on the case to reach out to the prison’s [Litigation Coordinator](mailto:)
- Contact facility’s Warden [here](mailto:)
- If release date within 60 days and may qualified for [expedited](mailto:) release [James King](mailto:) james@ellabakercenter.org
- If referred by CDCR under Penal Code section 1170(d)(1) for resentencing, contact [emily@ellabakercenter.org](mailto:emily@ellabakercenter.org)
- The Public Defender’s office and/or the private attorney that handled your criminal case to request resentencing under PC 1170(d)(1) from CDCR or the DA. [Prison Law Office](mailto:) (PLO) General Delivery, San Quentin, CA 94964 office@prisonlaw.com
- Rosen, Bien, Galvan, & Grunfeld (RBGG) 101 Mission St. 6th Fl, San Francisco, CA 94105 [Email](mailto:)
- Governor Gavin Newsom State Capitol, 1303 10th St., Suite 1173, Sacramento, CA 95814. Submit commutation application. Contact kelli.evans@gov.ca.gov, eliza.hersh@gov.ca.gov.
- The [superior](mailto:) court where the prison is through a writ of habeas corpus/mandate.
- The [federal](mailto:) court where the prison is through a habeas/civil rights suit under 42 U.S.C. 1983.
- The [legislators](mailto:) representing your home / district you are incarcerated in.
- Your loved ones. They can submit packages to advocate for your release. You should fill out medical and general release and authorization forms so they can obtain documents from CDCR and allow CDCR to speak to them. These forms include the [CDCR 1019/1021](mailto:) custody records release, [CDCR 7385](mailto:) (health record release authorization) (updated October 2019 version), [CDCR 7421](mailto:) Advance Directive for Health Care (updated June 2018 version).
- Stanford Three Strike Project, Michael Romano, 650 736.8670, mromano@stanford.edu, Susan Champion 650 736.7757 schampion@law.stanford.edu, Milena Blake milenab@stanford.edu Crown Quadrangle, 559 Nathan Abbott Way Stanford, CA 94305-8610

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Please note, if you send anything to PAN: PAN will not file anything in court, with CDCR, or with the Governor on your behalf. PAN is all volunteer-run, and with the shelter-in-place order we expect mail will be delayed 2-4 weeks. We can never return originals.
What is COVID-19 and How Can It Affect You?

COVID-19 is a virus that can cause fever, respiratory problems, and sometimes gastrointestinal symptoms. Since emerging in China in December 2019, this new coronavirus has caused a global health emergency. It is likely to be transmitted in droplets from coughing or sneezes, or by touching contaminated surfaces or objects and then touching your eyes, nose or mouth. The virus has a 2 to 14 day incubation period. That means people could be infectious for quite a while before symptoms like fever, cough, or shortness of breath emerge.

The United States, along with several other countries, has imposed a “shelter in place” order, requiring Americans who do not work for “essential businesses” (like restaurants, hospitals, and grocery stores) to stay at home. The Government is also requiring everyone to abide by a “social distancing” policy where there must be at least 6 feet of space between people.

As you might imagine, these requirements present particularly troubling concerns for those who are incarcerated in America’s prisons and jails. Incarcerated folks, who are kept in close quarters, are unable to take many of the disease-prevention measures other people are now practicing. Therefore, COVID-19 is especially dangerous to the incarcerated population, for whom social distancing is impossible.

Ways to Prevent the Spread of COVID-19

Below are the recommendations according to the Center for Disease Control (CDC) and World Health Organization (WHO). [If the policies at your facility are not following these guidelines, make note of your specific situation and keep in your records.

- Recommended protocol for wearing masks:
  - Place mask carefully to cover mouth and nose and tie securely to minimize any gaps between face and mask. While in use, avoid touching the mask.
  - Remove the mask by using an appropriate technique (i.e. do not touch the front but remove by the headband from behind).
  - After removal or whenever you inadvertently touch a used mask, clean hands by using an alcohol-based hand sanitizer (if available) or soap and water.
  - Replace masks with a new clean, dry mask as soon as they become damp/humid.
  - Do not reuse single-use masks.
  - Discard single-use masks after each use, and dispose of them immediately upon removal (consider a central place in the ward/cell block where used masks can be discarded).
Cloth (e.g., cotton or gauze) masks are not recommended if you are exhibiting symptoms. Double-sided cloth masks can be used if you are healthy.

- **Disinfecting protocol**: First, clean surfaces with a mix of soap and water, or a detergent. Then apply the disinfectant for the required contact time, as per the manufacturer’s recommendations. The disinfectant may be rinsed off with clean water after the contact time has elapsed. If possible, keep the door closed with windows open to improve airflow and ventilation while using detergent and disinfection products.

- **Waste**: Should be treated as infectious clinical medical waste. Don’t touch with bare hands.

- **Laundry**: Clothes, bedclothes, bath and hand towels, etc. can be cleaned using regular laundry soap and water or machine-washed at 60–90°C with common laundry detergent.

- **Terms to Know**
  - **Medical Isolation** – Medical isolation refers to conning a confirmed or suspected COVID-19 case (ideally to a single cell with solid walls and a solid door that closes), to prevent contact with others and to reduce the risk of transmission. Medical isolation ends when the individual meets pre-established clinical and/or testing criteria for release from isolation, in consultation with clinical providers and public health officials. In this context, isolation does NOT refer to punitive isolation for behavioral infractions within the custodial setting.
  
  - **Quarantine** – Quarantine refers to the practice of conning individuals who have had close contact with a COVID-19 case to determine whether they develop symptoms of the disease. Quarantine for COVID-19 should last for a period of 14 days. Ideally, each quarantined individual would be quarantined in a single cell with solid walls and a solid door that closes. If symptoms develop during the 14-day period, the individual should be placed under medical isolation and evaluated for COVID-19. If symptoms do not develop, movement restrictions can be lifted, and the individual can return to their previous residency status within the facility.