Printed November 4, 2026

Last checked against official sources: November 3, 2026

Mailing this to someone inside? Print one side only, black ink, plain white paper. No staples or clips. Put their full name and number on the envelope. Some facilities limit pages per envelope: check their mail rules first.

FEDERAL PRISON GUIDE

VISIT PACKET: FCI MCDOWELL

Federal Correctional Institution · Welch, WV · Phone 304-436-7300

VISITING

VISITING HOURS AND DAYS

WHO	DAYS	HOURS
FCI (main prison)	Saturday, Sunday and all federal holidays	8:00 a.m. to 3:00 p.m.
Satellite camp (SPC)	Saturday, Sunday and all federal holidays. Outside visiting is allowed at the camp.	8:00 a.m. to 3:00 p.m.
Special Housing Unit (SHU)	Monday, by appointment only, in blocks of 2 hours. At most 2 visitors for one block. The inmate sets it up through the SHU Lieutenant.	8:15 a.m. to 10:15 a.m., 10:35 a.m. to 12:35 p.m., or 1:00 p.m. to 3:00 p.m.

Visitors are not processed before 8:00 a.m. or after 2:00 p.m. Processing stops during counts. Do not arrive on the grounds before visiting starts. When the visit is over you must leave the grounds right away.

The visiting rules list no regular visiting days except Saturday, Sunday and federal holidays (plus Monday for the SHU). [1]

The BOP's own papers disagree. The McDowell handbook is from **August 27, 2012** and says the FCI is open **Saturday, Sunday, Monday** and federal holidays. The newer visiting rules (December 14, 2022) list Monday only for SHU visits by appointment. Go by the newer rules and call 304-436-7300 before you drive on a Monday.

THE RULES AT THE DOOR: ID, POINTS, WHAT YOU CAN BRING

HOW MANY PEOPLE	No more than **5 approved visitors at a time, children included**. They can ask their Unit Team in writing for more. Children 15 or younger must come with an approved adult visitor. [1]
SPLIT VISITS	If they have 5 visitors and some leave, the same number or fewer can replace them. Normally only one swap is approved. [1]
CHILDREN 16 AND 17	Without a parent, guardian or immediate family member who is at least 18, they need that person's written approval first. [1]

ID	A valid driver's license or official photo ID such as a military ID, state ID or passport. Club membership cards, check cashing cards and school IDs are not accepted. **Mexican Consulate ID cards are not accepted** for entry to the FCI. [1]
SCREENING	You must clear the metal detector or your visit is denied. Keys, coins and metal items come off first. You may get a random pat search by a staff member of the same sex. You sign BP Form 224 (Notification to Visitor) before you go in. [1]
MONEY FOR VENDING MACHINES	No more than a total of **$20**, with no bill larger than a dollar. Food is bought from the machines; do not bring food. [1]
WHAT YOU CAN CARRY	A small clear plastic container or bag no bigger than 8 by 12 inches, the vending money, your photo ID and essential medicine (an asthma inhaler or nitroglycerin, only the amount for the visit, held by the officer). Phones and other electronics stay in your car or the lockers. [1]
FOR A BABY	Per child: 2 diapers, 1 unopened package of wipes, 1 change of clothes, 2 clear baby bottles, 1 container of unopened formula and 2 unopened small jars of baby food. [1]
DRESS CODE	No overly tight, revealing or suggestive clothes: tight or revealing slacks, miniskirts, shorts, halter tops, strapless dresses or tops, spandex and sleeveless shirts. No hats, bandanas or scarves. Shoes are required. Staff can turn you away for dress. [1]
TOUCHING	Hand shaking, a kiss and an embrace are allowed, only at the start and at the end of the visit. [1]
WHEN IT GETS CROWDED	Staff first ask for volunteers. Then visits are ended starting with visitors who **live closest** to the prison, then those who visit **most often**. A two-hour limit can be put in place. The visiting areas hold 298 (FCI) and 117 (camp). [1]
POINTS	The visiting rules do not mention a points system. The handbook (2012) says only that visiting may be limited on an hourly or other basis. [1]

HOW TO GET ON THE VISITING LIST

1. Your loved one gets the visitor information form from their counselor. The form number is not given in the McDowell papers (the BOP national form is BP-A0629; unconfirmed here).
2. Fill it out and return it to their Unit Team.
3. The Unit Team does a background check. If there is a problem, such as a different answer or a criminal record hit, the **Unit Manager** decides and can say no.
4. The Unit Manager tells them, and **they** tell you. Do not drive until you are approved.
5. The list holds up to **20 visitors**. Ordinarily no more than **10** should be friends and associates. They can ask for changes at any time, at open house.
6. People who are not on the list can write the prison at least two weeks before to ask for a one-time approval and explain why.

Fill out the visiting form for McDowell

[1]

DRIVING DIRECTIONS (FROM THE BOP)

FROM BECKLEY, WV	Turn left on WV-16 and stay straight on WV-121 South. Turn right onto Slab Fork Road/CR-34 and continue on CR-34. Turn right onto WV-97, then left onto WV-10, then right onto WV-16. Continue south until you enter McDowell County. Take the first right onto 101 Federal Drive. A Federal Institution sign marks the spot.
FROM BLUEFIELD, WV	Take US-52 North, then turn right onto WV-16 North. Go about 7 miles on WV-16 North. A Federal Institution sign marks the location. There is no local transportation.

Street address for your GPS: 101 Federal Drive, Welch, Wv 24801. [2]

WHAT TO WEAR TO A VISIT

The BOP beats to its own drum. The front desk has the final say. Keep a spare outfit in the car.

FCI MCDOWELL

Rules dated **December 14, 2022** (4 years old)

Official rules (PDF)(bop.gov/locations/institutions/mcd/mcd_visit.pdf) En español (PDF)(bop.gov/locations/institutions/mcd/mcd_visit_sp.pdf)

4 years old. Ask your loved one to check the copy posted in the unit before you drive.

These rules contradict themselves. When two rules disagree, dress by the stricter one.

Skirts and dresses	Skirts/shorts/dresses no shorter than 2 inches above mid-knee; no slits above knee.
Shorts	Shorts no shorter than 2 inches above mid-knee; no sweat shorts.
Colors to avoid	No khaki or tan pants, shirts, jackets, or coats. No clothing available to inmates through commissary.
Leggings, spandex	No pantyhose-type leggings, spandex, or leotards unless covered by a dress/skirt. No tight or form-fitting dresses such as knit or spandex.
Bras and metal	Avoid metal clothing; underwire bras cannot be removed before detector.
Camouflage, military	Not in the written rules. Many prisons ban both; leave them home.
Shoes	No open-toe footwear or shoes without a back. No flip flops.
Children	Length rule applies only to persons over 10 years of age.

ALL 27 RULES, IN THE BOP'S OWN WORDS

LENGTH AND FIT

- Skirts/shorts/dresses no shorter than 2 inches above mid-knee; no slits above knee.
  BOP wording: "Skirts , shorts or dresses must not be shorter than two"
- Shorts no shorter than 2 inches above mid-knee; no sweat shorts.
  BOP wording: "Skirts , shorts or dresses must not be shorter than two"
- No tank tops or sleeveless shirts.
  BOP wording: "chest/breasts , and back . Tank tops ae not permissible ."
- Tops must cover stomach, chest/breasts, and back.
  BOP wording: "Tops will cover the upper body , including stomach ,"
- No halter tops or strapless dresses/tops.
  BOP wording: "st rapless dr essed/tops , spande x clothing and sleeveless s h i r ts) . Hats , bandanas ,"
- No see-through material.
  BOP wording: "Clothing made of see - through material will not be"
- No tight or form-fitting dresses such as knit or spandex.
  BOP wording: "age . Tight or form fitting dresses such as knit ,"
- No pantyhose-type leggings, spandex, or leotards unless covered by a dress/skirt.

BOP wording: "Any " pantyhose " type leggings , Spandex , leotards ,"

- No pants with holes unless covered by an appropriate dress/skirt.
  BOP wording: "etc ., or pa n ts with holes , will not be permit t ed"
- No sweat pants or sweat shorts.
  BOP wording: "through the commissary such as sweat pants , sweat"

COLORS AND UNIFORMS

- No khaki or tan pants, shirts, jackets, or coats.
  BOP wording: "Any khaki or tan colored pants , shirts , jackets or"
- No clothing available to inmates through commissary.
  BOP wording: "Any clothing accessible to the inmate population"

BRAS, UNDERWEAR AND METAL

- Avoid metal clothing; underwire bras cannot be removed before detector.
  BOP wording: "metal , i . e . underwire bras , cannot be removed before passi n g through the"

SHOES

- No open-toe footwear or shoes without a back.
  BOP wording: "Open toe footwear(i . e ., flip flops , shoes without a"
- No flip flops.
  BOP wording: "Open toe footwear(i . e ., flip flops , shoes without a"

HATS, HOODS AND COATS

- No hats, visors, head wraps, headbands, bandanas, or scarves.
  BOP wording: "Head - wear such as hats , visors , head wraps or"
- Religious headwear is allowed.
  BOP wording: "headbands (wi th exception to religious head - wear) will"
- No hooded jackets or shirts.
  BOP wording: "not be permitted . Sunglasses , or any hooded jackets or"

CHILDREN

- Length rule applies only to persons over 10 years of age.
  BOP wording: "inches above the mid - knee for persons over 10 years of"

EVERYTHING ELSE

- No suggestive or offensive words or pictures.
  BOP wording: "offensive words or pictures will not be · permitted."
- No wrap-around dresses, skirts, or tops.
  BOP wording: "permitted. Dresses , skirts , or tops that wrap around"
- No plain white T-shirts.
  BOP wording: "sh orts , and plain white t -shirts are not permitted ."
- No footwear with rolling wheels.
  BOP wording: "back , etc .) may not be worn . Footwear with rolling"
- No sunglasses or watches of any kind, including smart watches.

BOP wording: "Watches of any kind will not be worn (i . e . apple"

- No provocative or excessively revealing attire.
  BOP wording: "revealing attire will not be permitted in the"

IF THEY SAY NO

- Visit may be denied if supervisors find dress inappropriate.
  BOP wording: "a n d scarves are not a u thorize d . Visitors may be denied a visit if supervisory"
- IDO and/or Operations Lieutenant resolve clothing discrepancies.
  BOP wording: "may be resolved by the IDO and/or OPS Lieut enant ."

MAIL AND THE MAILING ADDRESS

Use their committed name exactly as the BOP Inmate Locator shows it. The name and number below are examples (JOHN ANTHONY SMITH-JONES, 12345-678).

JOHN ANTHONY SMITH-JONES
Reg. No. 12345-678
FCI McDowell
P.O. Box 1009
Welch, Wv 24801

The mailing address is on the Mail tab. Ask your loved one for their unit and whether they are at the FCI or the camp. [2]

The **camp uses the same P.O. Box**.

Use the P.O. Box only. Never mail to the street address (101 Federal Drive, Welch, Wv 24801).

BOOKS AND MAGAZINES	Books, magazines and newspapers must be mailed from the publishing company. [1]
LEGAL MAIL	To be treated as legal mail the envelope must carry the attorney's name and a note that the sender is an attorney. [2]
MONEY	Do not put checks, letters, pictures or any other item in the envelope with money. Mail money to the BOP lockbox in Des Moines (see the Money tab). [2]
OTHER MAIL RULES	The McDowell handbook is from 2012 and we did not find current envelope, card or paper rules. Call the prison before you send photos, cards or packages. [2]

Books and magazines: at a medium security prison, books and magazines must come straight from a publisher, book club or bookstore (Amazon, for example), never from home.

Sources

1. MCD 5267.09B, Inmate Visitation (December 14, 2022) bop.gov/locations/institutions/mcd/mcd_visit.pdf
2. FCI McDowell Admission and Orientation Handbook (revised August 27, 2012) bop.gov/locations/institutions/mcd/mcd_ao-handbook.pdf