

# Chapter 31

## SECURITY CLASSIFICATION AND GANG VALIDATION\*

### A. Introduction

Upon entering the prison system, all prisoners are assigned a security classification, which is reevaluated regularly. Your security classification largely determines where you are incarcerated and what sort of treatment you receive while in prison. A lower security classification is better because it means that you have more freedoms and fewer restrictions. You can think of gang validation as a subset of security classification. Gang validation is the process that prison officials use to identify prisoners that they suspect of being members of gangs or “Security Threat Groups” (“STGs”). If you have been validated as a member of a gang, it means that prison officials have classified you as someone who poses a particular security risk and you may be isolated from other prisoners.

Part B of this Chapter discusses general security classification. It starts with a description of the guidelines for prisoner classification in the Federal Bureau of Prisons (“BOP”) and in New York State, California, and Florida, and then explains some of the legal challenges that prisoners have raised to classification decisions in the past. Keep in mind that these challenges have been largely unsuccessful. Part B ends with a description of administrative options for challenging a particular security classification. Part C outlines gang validation and begins with a general discussion of the process, followed by a summary of the ways that prisoners have used the Fourteenth Amendment, the Eighth Amendment, the Fifth Amendment, and equal protection claims to challenge their validation as gang members. Because these legal challenges have been largely unsuccessful, the Chapter concludes with some suggestions for challenging gang validation using administrative options.

### B. General Security Classification

#### 1. Introduction

In all states, you will be assigned a security classification shortly after entering the prison system. This Chapter focuses on the classification guidelines operating in the Federal Bureau of Prisons, in New York’s Department of Correctional Services (“DOCS”), in California’s Department of Corrections and Rehabilitation (“CDCR”), and in Florida’s Department of Corrections (“FDOC”). It also focuses on attempts that prisoners have made to challenge their classification under these guidelines in court. Most other state prisons use similar classification systems to evaluate prisoners in terms of both public and private risk. Courts in most jurisdictions, including New York, California, and Florida, are reluctant to interfere in what they view as a prison’s internal administrative matters. However, you should investigate the details of your own state’s procedures.

You should be able to obtain a copy of the classification manual for the system in which you are incarcerated. The classification manual should allow you to verify that the criteria used to evaluate you are accurate. However, in some states, such as New York, the classification manual is primarily a set of guidelines for entering data into a computer program. Without access to that computer program, the classification manual will not be very useful, although you may still find it helpful to examine the classification criteria in greater detail.

#### 2. Federal Bureau of Prisons Classification Guidelines<sup>1</sup>

##### (a) Security Level Score

In the federal prison system, new prisoners are assigned a security level score by a Community Corrections Manager in the Bureau of Prisons (“BOP”). This score is used by Regional and Central Office

---

\* This Chapter was revised by Romie Barriere, based in part on previous versions by Ben Van Houten and Daniel Green. Thanks to John Boston for his valuable feedback.

1. The Federal Bureau of Prisons classification guidelines are documented in U.S. Department of Justice, Federal Bureau of Prisons, Program Statement 5100.08 (2006), *available at* [http://www.bop.gov/policy/progstat/5100\\_008.pdf](http://www.bop.gov/policy/progstat/5100_008.pdf) (last visited October 9, 2011).

Designators to assign new prisoners to an institution with a corresponding level of security, as determined by the security measures in place at the institution.<sup>2</sup>

Approximately seven months after a prisoner arrives at the institution, he will have his first program review following initial classification. At this time, the prisoner will be given a custody classification score. This score refers to how much staff supervision is required for the prisoner within and beyond the confines of the institution. It determines, among other things, the types of work assignments and activities that a prisoner may participate in, and the level of staff supervision required.<sup>3</sup> Note that the custody level score is different from the security level score, which is used to match a prisoner with a specific type of institution based on the institution's security features.

A prisoner's custody classification must be reviewed at least every twelve months and is usually reviewed at the same time as program reviews.<sup>4</sup> Additionally, a prisoner's security level and custody level will usually be reviewed when a new sentence is imposed, when a sentence is reduced, when a disciplinary action occurs, or when there is a "change in external factors" that "might affect the security or custody level."<sup>5</sup>

The calculation of a new prisoner's security level score is based on the prisoner's Pre-Sentence Investigation Report ("PSI"), a copy of the judgment from the prisoner's case, and the Individual Custody and Detention Report provided by the U.S. Marshals Service. Where no PSI has been prepared, a Post-Sentence Investigation Report will be prepared. In some cases, a Magistrate Information Sheet may be used. The BOP has identified several factors that are considered in the determination of the security level score:

- (1) The "level of security and supervision the inmate requires;"
- (2) The "level of security and staff supervision the institution is able to provide;"
- (3) The prisoner's program needs (including substance abuse, medical/mental health treatment, educational training, group counseling and other programs); and
- (4) Various administrative factors, including the level of overcrowding in an institution, its distance from the prisoner's release residence, and any recommendations that the judge may have offered.<sup>6</sup>

In considering these factors, the BOP uses a detailed scoring system including elements based on the severity of the current offense, any past offenses, and other relevant details. Scores in various elements are entered into a database known as SENTRY. This database then calculates a prisoner's security level score; for a detailed breakdown of this calculation, you should refer to the BOP Program Statement.

#### (b) Other Safety Factors

In addition to the scoring system, the BOP may also check if any of 11 "public safety factors" are present in the prisoner's case. These public safety factors are: (1) validated membership in a "disruptive group" identified in the Central Inmate Monitoring System (males only); (2) current term of confinement in the "Greatest Severity" range according to the Offense Severity Scale (males only); (3) sex offender status; (4) Central Inmate Monitoring assignment of threat to government official; (5) deportable alien status; (6) remaining sentence length (males only); (7) violent behavior (females only); (8) involvement in a serious escape; (9) prison disturbance; (10) juvenile violence; and (11) serious telephone abuse.<sup>7</sup> If any of these factors are present, they will raise a prisoner's security classification despite a score that would, on its own, produce a lower classification.<sup>8</sup> At maximum, three of these factors will be applied to a prisoner. If more than

---

2. U.S. Dep't of Justice, Federal Bureau of Prisons, Program Statement 5100.08, Inmate Security Designation and Custody Classification Manual, ch. 3, at 3 (2006).

3. U.S. Dep't. of Justice, Federal Bureau of Prisons, Program Statement 5100.08, Inmate Security Designation and Custody Classification Manual, ch. 6, at 1 (2006).

4. U.S. Dep't. of Justice, Federal Bureau of Prisons, Program Statement 5100.08, Inmate Security Designation and Custody Classification Manual, ch. 6, at 1 (2006).

5. U.S. Dep't. of Justice, Federal Bureau of Prisons, Program Statement 5100.08, Inmate Security Designation and Custody Classification Manual, ch. 6, at 1 (2006).

6. U.S. Dep't. of Justice, Federal Bureau of Prisons, Program Statement 5100.08, Inmate Security Designation and Custody Classification Manual, ch. 1, at 1-2 (2006).

7. U.S. Dep't. of Justice, Federal Bureau of Prisons, Program Statement 5100.08, Inmate Security Designation and Custody Classification Manual, ch. 5, at 7-10 (2006).

8. U.S. Dep't. of Justice, Federal Bureau of Prisons, Program Statement 5100.08, Inmate Security Designation and Custody Classification Manual, ch. 2, at 4 (2006).

three of the factors apply, those that would provide the greatest public safety and security threat are considered.<sup>9</sup> These factors may be waived at the discretion of the Regional Director.

In addition, the Regional Director may find that any of 11 “management variables” apply, which would result in a prisoner’s placement at an institution that is not at the same security level as the prisoner’s security level score.<sup>10</sup> Examples of Management Variables include population management, medical or psychiatric history, and greater security concerns.<sup>11</sup> Management variables generally relate to administrative considerations that might result in a prisoner’s placement in a specific institution, while Public Safety Factors are considerations that relate to the BOP’s concern with the threat a prisoner poses to society.

Custody classification evaluations are calculated in a similar way, using a scoring system based primarily upon a prisoner’s criminal history and behavior within the institution. The warden has discretion to assign a prisoner a custody level different from the one indicated by the scoring system. If this is done, an explanation must be noted on the prisoner’s custody classification form. Public safety factors and management variables may be used in this determination.

There are different scoring systems for calculating the security levels of male and female prisoners. Persons under the age of 18 are not subject to this classification system. In addition, certain special cases have special designation procedures, including military prisoners and some medical or mental health cases. Please consult the Program Statement for a full list of descriptions of these special cases.

### 3. New York’s Classification Guidelines

In New York, new prisoners are assigned an initial classification score at a reception facility. Reclassification hearings occur periodically. In New York State, the initial reclassification screening occurs six months after a prisoner is taken into custody; subsequent reclassifications take place every three months after that.<sup>12</sup> The counselor assigning the classification enters numerical factors into a computer program, which then calculates a score. The information used to determine the factor values comes from evidence presented in the Commitment Paper, the Presentence Report (“PSR”), warrants, the Division of Criminal Justice Services (“DCJS”) Summary Case History (“Rap Sheet”), sentencing minutes (when available), your interview, and, if you have served a prior DOCS term, any available Department records of that term.<sup>13</sup> Both official and unofficial documents may be relied upon, though evidence from unofficial documents “should be evaluated in relation to official documents and used where appropriate.”<sup>14</sup> If a counselor cannot resolve inconsistencies between documents, the counselor is supposed to use the “most cautious alternative.”<sup>15</sup>

New York’s Security Classification Guidelines identify two types of security risks: (1) public risk, which is the likelihood that a prisoner will escape and be a danger to the public; and (2) institutional risk, which is the likelihood that a prisoner will be dangerous to staff, other prisoners, or himself while incarcerated. The Guidelines use four main factors to determine public risk: (1) history of criminal violence; (2) history of escape and abscondence (hiding to avoid legal proceedings); (3) time until earliest possible release; and (4) family, employment, school, and military history.<sup>16</sup> The Guidelines identify two main factors that determine institutional risk: (1) family, employment, school, and military history; and (2) institutional disciplinary history.<sup>17</sup>

---

9. U.S. Dep’t. of Justice, Federal Bureau of Prisons, Program Statement 5100.08, Inmate Security Designation and Custody Classification Manual, ch. 5, at 7 (2006).

10. U.S. Dep’t. of Justice, Federal Bureau of Prisons, Program Statement 5100.08, Inmate Security Designation and Custody Classification Manual, ch. 5, at 1 (2006).

11. U.S. Dep’t. of Justice, Federal Bureau of Prisons, Program Statement 5100.08, Inmate Security Designation and Custody Classification Manual, ch. 5, at 3–5 (2006).

12. State of New York Dep’t. of Correctional Services, Office of Classification and Movement, Classification Manual, II-85 (1996). To acquire a copy of this manual, you may need to file a request under the Freedom of Information Act. Please refer to Chapter 7 of the *JLM*, “Freedom of Information,” for more information on FOIA requests.

13. State of New York, Dep’t. of Correctional Services, Office of Classification and Movement, Classification Manual, II-43 (1996).

14. State of New York, Dep’t. of Correctional Services, Office of Classification and Movement, Classification Manual, II-43 (1996).

15. State of New York, Dep’t. of Correctional Services, Office of Classification and Movement, Classification Manual, II-43 (1996).

16. State of New York, Dep’t. of Correctional Services, Office of Classification and Movement, Classification Manual, II-1 (1996).

17. State of New York, Dep’t. of Correctional Services, Office of Classification and Movement, Classification

These characteristics are all evaluated by point scores. The point scores are then combined to produce your security classification. More specific descriptions of each of the characteristics can be found in the State of New York DOCS Classification Manual. The Classification Manual also describes the procedures used for assigning point values and the way in which a score is calculated from these values.<sup>18</sup>

In addition to these main characteristics, you should know that there are 35 additional characteristics that are difficult to assign point values to, or that aren't used very often. These additional characteristics can affect the classification you receive and may qualify you for a higher classification level, even if you receive point total that might alone produce a lower classification.<sup>19</sup>

You should also be aware that the characteristics for male and female prisoners may have different elements.<sup>20</sup> Male and female prisoners' scores are evaluated against different classification schemes. The elements for minor and adult prisoners may also differ. Finally, there are some cases in which the counselor will feel that the point score does not accurately represent your security risk, and he is permitted to adjust the security classification, although he must provide an explanation for doing so.<sup>21</sup> Most other state prison systems have similar provisions that let a counselor or other official assign you a security classification that differs from the one produced from the scoring system.<sup>22</sup>

#### 4. California's Classification Guidelines

In California, new prisoners are assigned a classification score when they are committed to state prison.<sup>23</sup> This classification determines the type of institution in which the prisoner is placed. In California, there are four levels of prisons. Level 1 houses the least dangerous prisoners, and Level 4 houses the most dangerous. In order to fill out a prisoner classification score sheet, a counselor will first review documents, such as probation reports, and then interview the prisoner.<sup>24</sup> A committee will then conduct a hearing to determine your classification.<sup>25</sup> The committee will review the counselor's score sheet and consider various factors during the hearing, including: 1) background information such as your age at first arrest, current prison term, street gang affiliation, mental illness, prior sentences, and prior incarcerations; and 2) your prior behavior while incarcerated.<sup>26</sup> These factors are assigned point scores; your total score will determine your classification. Sometimes, the law requires a mandatory minimum score for certain sentences or crimes, which will replace your score if it is below the mandatory minimum.<sup>27</sup> In other cases, prison officials can adjust your score if necessary for safety or other institutional needs, such as prison overcrowding.<sup>28</sup> A score

---

Manual, II-1 (1996); *see also* N.Y. Comp. Codes R. & Regs. tit. 7, app. 1-E (2008).

18. State of New York, Dep't. of Correctional Services, Office of Classification and Movement, Classification Manual, II-1-2 (1996).

19. State of New York, Dep't. of Correctional Services, Office of Classification and Movement, Classification Manual, II-1 (1996).

20. State of New York, Dep't. of Correctional Services, Office of Classification and Movement, Classification Manual, II-3 (1996).

21. State of New York, Dep't. of Correctional Services, Office of Classification and Movement, Classification Manual, II-3-4 (1996).

22. *See, e.g.*, State of California, Dep't. of Corrections & Rehabilitation, Operations Manual §§ 61010.8, 61020.13 (2004), *available at* [http://www.cdcr.ca.gov/Regulations/Adult\\_Operations/docs/DOM/DOM\\_Ch\\_6-Printed\\_Final.pdf](http://www.cdcr.ca.gov/Regulations/Adult_Operations/docs/DOM/DOM_Ch_6-Printed_Final.pdf) (last visited October 11, 2011) (authorizing department officials to depart from the classification scoring system in individual cases); 103 Mass. Code Regs. 420.08(f) (1995) (authorizing override of scored classification level); N.J. Admin. Code § 10A: 9-2.14 (Supp. June 20, 2011) (providing for override of the initial classification determined by scoring); Or. Admin. R. 291-078-0020(4) (2011) (providing for either decreases or increases in the level of supervision from that determined through the risk assessment score).

23. Cal. Penal Code § 5068 (2012).

24. State of California, Dep't. of Corrections & Rehabilitation, Operations Manual § 61010.9 (2004), *available at* [http://www.cdcr.ca.gov/Regulations/Adult\\_Operations/docs/DOM/DOM\\_Ch\\_6-Printed\\_Final.pdf](http://www.cdcr.ca.gov/Regulations/Adult_Operations/docs/DOM/DOM_Ch_6-Printed_Final.pdf) (last visited October 11, 2011). To acquire a print copy, you may need to file a request under the Freedom of Information Act. Please refer to Chapter 7 of the *JLM*, "Freedom of Information," for more information on FOIA requests.

25. Cal. Code Regs. tit. 15, §§ 3375-76 (2010).

26. Cal. Code Regs. tit. 15, § 3375.3 (2010).

27. Cal. Code Regs. tit. 15, § 3375.3 (2010); *see also* State of California, Department of Corrections & Rehabilitation, Operations Manual § 61010.11.5 (2004), *available at* [http://www.cdcr.ca.gov/Regulations/Adult\\_Operations/docs/DOM/DOM\\_Ch\\_6-Printed\\_Final.pdf](http://www.cdcr.ca.gov/Regulations/Adult_Operations/docs/DOM/DOM_Ch_6-Printed_Final.pdf) (last visited October 11, 2011).

28. State of California, Dep't. of Correction & Rehabilitation, Operations Manual § 61010.8 (2004), *available at* [http://www.cdcr.ca.gov/Regulations/Adult\\_Operations/docs/DOM/DOM\\_Ch\\_6-Printed\\_Final.pdf](http://www.cdcr.ca.gov/Regulations/Adult_Operations/docs/DOM/DOM_Ch_6-Printed_Final.pdf) (last visited October 11, 2011).

of 0–18 means placement in a Level 1 institution; a score of 19–27 means placement in a Level 2 institution; a score 28–51 means placement in a Level 3 institution; and a score higher than 51 means placement in a Level 4 institution.<sup>29</sup>

The committee will reclassify you and recalculate your score at least once a year.<sup>30</sup> When possible, the committee should give you notice before any hearing so that you have time to prepare.<sup>31</sup> At the hearing, the committee will consider two things: 1) your favorable behavior since the last review, such as six month periods without any serious disciplinary actions and six month periods with average or above average performance in certain programs; and 2) any unfavorable behavior since the last review, such as serious misbehavior, assault, possession of a deadly weapon, drug distribution, or starting a riot.<sup>32</sup> Favorable behavior will reduce your score and unfavorable behavior will increase your score. Remember, a lower score means a lower classification and placement in a less secure institution.

## 5. Florida's Classification Guidelines

In Florida, security classification decisions are made by two groups, the Institutional Classification Team ("ICT") and the State Classification Office ("SCO").<sup>33</sup> The ICT includes the warden or assistant warden, the classification supervisor, and a correctional officer chief, and is responsible for making work, program, housing, and prisoner status decisions at a facility and for making other recommendations to the State Classification Office.<sup>34</sup> The State Classification Office is responsible for reviewing recommendations made by the ICT.<sup>35</sup> When a new prisoner arrives, the ICT uses the Custody Assessment and Reclassification computer program ("CARS") to prepare an automated custody classification questionnaire using all available sources to determine the appropriate degree of supervision, including information such as your criminal history and sentence.<sup>36</sup> When the questionnaire is completed, a computer generated numerical score is used to place prisoners in one of five security classification levels (maximum, close, medium, minimum, and community), which are called "custody grades" by the Florida Department of Corrections.<sup>37</sup> The most restrictive custody grade is maximum custody status, which usually refers to prisoners who are sentenced to death.<sup>38</sup> The least restrictive custody grade is a community custody status, which makes a prisoner eligible for placement in a community residential facility.<sup>39</sup> Changes can be made to a prisoner's custody grade for various reasons, including changes in charges due to plea bargaining, public interest concerns, family environment, military record, age, and health.<sup>40</sup> Other factors that may affect your custody status include sex offenses, alien status, escape, and gain time credits.<sup>41</sup> The SCO can also start a new custody assessment when they decide it is "necessary for the safety of the public or the needs of the department."<sup>42</sup>

---

29. State of California, Department of Corrections & Rehabilitation, Operations Manual § 61010.11.7 (2004), available at [http://www.cdcr.ca.gov/Regulations/Adult\\_Operations/docs/DOM/DOM\\_Ch\\_6-Printed\\_Final.pdf](http://www.cdcr.ca.gov/Regulations/Adult_Operations/docs/DOM/DOM_Ch_6-Printed_Final.pdf) (last visited October 11, 2011).

30. Cal. Code Regs. tit. 15, § 3376(d)(2) (2010); see also State of California, Department of Corrections & Rehabilitation, Operations Manual § 61020.14 (2004), available at [http://www.cdcr.ca.gov/Regulations/Adult\\_Operations/docs/DOM/DOM\\_Ch\\_6-Printed\\_Final.pdf](http://www.cdcr.ca.gov/Regulations/Adult_Operations/docs/DOM/DOM_Ch_6-Printed_Final.pdf) (last visited October 11, 2011).

31. Cal. Code Regs. tit. 15, § 3375(e) (2010).

32. Cal. Code Regs. tit. 15, § 3375.4 (2010).

33. Fla. Admin. Code Ann. r. 33-601.209 (2011).

34. Fla. Admin. Code Ann. r. 33-601.209(3) (2011).

35. Fla. Admin. Code Ann. r. 33-601.209(2) (2011).

36. Fla. Admin. Code Ann. r. 33-601.210(2)(b) and (c) (2011).

37. Fla. Admin. Code Ann. r. 33-601.210(2)(a) (2011).

38. See Florida Department of Corrections Website, *Frequently Asked Questions Regarding Custody*, available at <http://www.dc.state.fl.us/oth/inmates/custody.html#1> (last visited March 24, 2010).

39. See Florida Department of Corrections Website, *Frequently Asked Questions Regarding Custody*, available at <http://www.dc.state.fl.us/oth/inmates/custody.html#1> (last visited March 24, 2010).

40. Fla. Admin. Code Ann. r. 33-601.210(2)(d) 1–9 (2011).

41. Fla. Admin. Code Ann. r. 33-601.210(2)(h) (2011) (listing the exceptions to the rule that prisoners convicted of crimes involving sex acts are not ordinarily eligible for community or minimum custody status); Fla. Admin. Code Ann. r. 33-601.210(2)(j) (2009) (specifying certain conditions under which alien prisoners shall not be assigned to a custody status any lower than close custody); Fla. Admin. Code Ann. r. 33-601.210(4)(e) (2009) (stating that a prison may alter the regular schedule for assessments and reviews in cases of escape or other unusual occurrences); Fla. Admin. Code Ann. r. 33-601.210(4)(k) (2009) ("Additional gain time is to be considered at the time of any scheduled or unscheduled review.").

42. Fla. Admin. Code Ann. r. 33-601.210 (2)(g) (2011).

The ICT will meet to review your custody status, assess your adjustment, and determine whether any changes may be necessary. You are required to appear at any review or assessment unless a documented permanent medical condition makes you unable to participate. You should receive notice at least 48 hours in advance unless you have waived your right to notice in writing. Assessments will occur at least every twelve months.<sup>43</sup> Custody grades can be increased or decreased throughout your sentence. If your behavior is favorable, your custody grade should decrease as the time remaining on your sentence decreases.

## 6. Classification of Female Prisoners

While many state correctional agencies use the same classification guidelines for male and female prisons, some states, including Idaho, Massachusetts, New York, and Ohio, as well as the Federal Bureau of Prisons, apply different guidelines or weigh factors differently. For example, as stated in Part B(2)(b) of this Chapter, the Federal Bureau of Prisons considers “violent behavior” as a public safety factor for female prisoners only, while factors specific to male prisoners include the severity of the offense, membership in a disruptive group and the remaining length of the sentence. Because there are greater numbers of men in prison, there are also more prisons built for male prisoners. Consequently, in many states, female prisoners with different classification levels are housed together. Female prisoners may also be over-classified or placed in a higher security level than necessary. The majority of classification systems were designed for male prisoners and fail to predict the needs of female prisoners.<sup>44</sup> In 2000, a group of female prisoners intervened in a class action lawsuit against the Michigan Department of Corrections (“MDOC”) and were able to reach a settlement concerning the classification of female prisoners. The MDOC agreed to make changes to the classification system as it was applied to female prisoners and to conduct research regarding the changes.<sup>45</sup> If you are considering bringing a similar lawsuit to challenge the use for females of a classification system designed for males, you should read this case closely and consider contacting an advocacy organization such as the Women’s Prison Association or the California Coalition for Women Prisoners.<sup>46</sup>

## 7. Legal Challenges to Classification Decisions

Generally, legal claims made to improve the conditions of imprisonment are filed under 42 U.S.C. § 1983. Because your security classification determines the conditions of your imprisonment, most prisoners who challenge their security classification file their claims under Section 1983. The U.S. Constitution and other federal statutes provide a broad range of individual rights. Section 1983 is a federal statute that protects you from violations of these rights by allowing you to sue the individuals responsible in federal court.<sup>47</sup> It is important to note that there is generally no federal law on the issue of classification, either substantively or as a matter of due process, because these matters are generally governed by state law. You should look to the law of your own state and individual prison regulations, and when it is possible you should always try to have the regulations enforced in state court. You can look to federal court if a state remedy does not exist, or if the federal remedy would override the state remedy.<sup>48</sup>

---

43. Fla. Admin. Code Ann. r. 33-601.210 (4)(c) (2010).

44. See Patricia L. Hardyman and Patricia Van Voorhis, U.S. Dep’t. of Justice and The Nat’l Inst. of Corr., *Developing Gender-Specific Classification Systems for Women Offenders* p. viii (2004) available at <http://static.nicic.gov/Library/018931.pdf> (last visited Oct. 29, 2011).

45. See *Female Prisoners’ Portion of Cain Case Settled*, 3 Prisons and Corr. Forum 6, 6-7 (Spring/Summer 2000), available at <http://www.michbar.org/prisons/pdfs/spring00.pdf> (last visited March 24, 2010) (the *Cain* settlement agreement included provisions agreeing to: hire an expert to evaluate the type, quantity, or quality of misconducts issued to male and female prisoners; ensure that female prisoners have access to legal assistance; provide an unmonitored telephone to allow prisoners to participate in court ordered hearings; and settle outstanding claims).

46. Women’s Prison Association, available at <http://www.wpaonline.org/> (last visited March 24, 2010); California Coalition for Women Prisoners, available at <http://www.womenprisoners.org/> (last visited March 24, 2010). For more information about the settlement, see the earlier class action suit, *Cain v. Dept of Corr.*, 548 N.W.2d 210, 451 Mich. 470 (Mich. 1996).

47. See, e.g., *Monroe v. Pape*, 365 U.S. 167, 172, 81 S. Ct. 473, 476, 5 L. Ed. 2d 492, 497 (1961) (applying § 1983 to illegal search of civilian home and detention of citizen by police), *overruled in unrelated part by* *Monell v. Dept of Soc. Servs. of the City of New York*, 436 U.S. 658, 695, 98 S. Ct. 2018, 2038, 56 L. Ed. 2d 611, 638 (1978).

48. See, e.g., *Monroe v. Pape*, 365 U.S. 167, 174, 81 S. Ct. 473, 477, 5 L. Ed. 2d 492, 498 (1961) (explaining that one aim of § 1983 is “to provide a federal remedy where the state remedy, though adequate in theory, was not available in practice”), *overruled in unrelated part by* *Monell v. Dept of Soc. Servs. of the City of New York*, 436 U.S. 658, 695, 98 S. Ct. 2018, 2038, 56 L. Ed. 2d 611, 638 (1978).

For detailed instructions on how to file a claim under Section 1983, see Chapter 16 of the *JLM*, “Using 42 U.S.C. § 1983 and 28 U.S.C. § 1331 to Obtain Relief from Violations of Federal Law.” It is also crucial that you read Chapter 14 of the *JLM*, on the Prison Litigation Reform Act (“PLRA”). The PLRA requires you to exhaust administrative remedies before filing suit and imposes substantial penalties if you fail to do so.<sup>49</sup>

One possible legal challenge to classification decisions is a due process challenge. The Due Process Clause of the Fourteenth Amendment protects individuals, including prisoners, from the loss of “life, liberty, or property” at the hands of the government without due process of law.<sup>50</sup> But, the Constitution itself does not provide prisoners the right to be housed at any particular classification level. Therefore, a prisoner must rely on state law to create a liberty interest in order to have a valid claim for denial of due process under the Fourteenth Amendment.<sup>51</sup> In 1995, in *Sandin v. Conner*, the Supreme Court created a new standard for determining whether conditions of imprisonment constitute a due process violation.<sup>52</sup> The new standard emphasizes the nature of the deprivation suffered by the prisoner. You should be careful researching this issue, however, as much of the case law on prisoner classification was decided under an old standard. You must make sure that the cases you research use the current *Sandin* standard.

In *Sandin*, the Court held that state-created liberty interests “will be generally limited to freedom from restraint which . . . imposes atypical and significant hardship on the inmate in relation to the ordinary incidents of prison life,”<sup>53</sup> and that the hardship imposed upon the prisoner must be of “real substance.”<sup>54</sup> Following *Sandin*, courts have been extremely reluctant to find that a particular security classification constitutes a deprivation of a constitutional liberty interest. Two key considerations are the conditions of segregation and the duration of segregation.<sup>55</sup> Prisoners have not been successful in convincing the court that the officials’ decision to classify them in a particular way constituted an “atypical and significant” deprivation of liberty. Prisoners have had more success, however, challenging long-term placement in administrative segregation.<sup>56</sup>

---

49. Most importantly, if you do not exhaust your administrative remedies, your case will be dismissed rather than stayed (held pending exhaustion). For more information on the exhaustion requirement, see Part E of Chapter 14 of the *JLM*, “The Prison Litigation Reform Act.”

50. U.S. Const. amend. XIV, § 1. For a more detailed discussion of liberty interests and the degree of due process rights owed to prisoners, see Chapter 18 of the *JLM*, “Your Rights at Prison Disciplinary Proceedings.”

51. *Sandin v. Conner*, 515 U.S. 472, 483–84, 115 S. Ct. 2293, 2300, 132 L. Ed. 2d 418, 429 (1995) (“States may under certain circumstances create liberty interests which are protected by the Due Process Clause.”).

52. *Sandin v. Conner*, 515 U.S. 472, 484, 115 S. Ct. 2293, 2300, 132 L. Ed. 2d 418, 430 (1995) (finding no liberty interest in prisoner’s administrative segregation absent “atypical and significant deprivation in relation to the ordinary incidents of prison life.”).

53. *Sandin v. Conner*, 515 U.S. 472, 484, 115 S. Ct. 2293, 2300, 132 L. Ed. 2d 418, 430 (1995).

54. Generally, hardships of “real substance” involve some physical injury or other deprivation related to an prisoner’s person. Otherwise, the unfair treatment may not be recognized as a constitutional liberty interest. *See, e.g.*, *Harper v. Showers*, 174 F.3d 716, 719 (5th Cir. 1999) (finding due process claim meritless because prisoner had no protectable interest in custodial classification and did not allege physical injury in claim for damages); *Martin v. Scott*, 156 F.3d 578, 580 (5th Cir. 1998) (holding that under ordinary circumstances administrative segregation will never be grounds for a constitutional claim because it does not constitute deprivation of a constitutional liberty interest) (citing *Pichardo v. Kinker*, 73 F. 3d 612, 612–613)(5th Cir. 1996).

55. In recent years, a number of circuit courts have addressed the question of classification rights under *Sandin* and have found a violation of a protected liberty interest in only limited cases. *See, e.g.*, *Iqbal v. Hasty*, 490 F.3d 143, 161 (2d Cir. 2007), (holding that a prisoner has a protected liberty interest “only if the deprivation . . . is atypical and significant and the state has created the liberty interest by statute or regulation”) (quoting *Sealey v. Giltner*, 116 F.3d 47, 52 (2d Cir. 1997); *rev’d on other grounds by Ashcroft v. Iqbal* 556 U.S. 662, 129 S. Ct. 1937, 1954 (2009); *Morales v. Chertoff*, No. 06-12752, 2006 U.S. App. LEXIS 31846, at \*3–4 (11th Cir. Dec. 27, 2006) (*unpublished*) (finding that the issue of custodial classification does not implicate an atypical or significant deprivation); *Portley-El v. Brill*, 288 F.3d 1063, 1065 (8th Cir. 2002) (holding that “administrative and disciplinary segregation are not atypical and significant hardships under *Sandin*”); *Leamer v. Fauver*, 288 F.3d 532, 546 (3d Cir. 2002) (holding that, “[u]nder *Sandin*, the mere fact of placement in administrative segregation is not in itself enough to implicate a liberty interest”); *Hatch v. District of Columbia*, 184 F.3d 846, 856 (D.C. Cir. 1999) (finding that, following *Sandin*, “a deprivation in prison implicates a liberty interest protected by the Due Process Clause only when it imposes an ‘atypical and significant hardship’ on an prisoner in relation to the most restrictive confinement conditions that prison officials, exercising their administrative authority to ensure institutional safety and good order, routinely impose on inmates serving similar sentences”); *Freitas v. Ault*, 109 F.3d 1335, 1337–38 (8th Cir. 1997) (holding that administrative detention and prison transfer without a hearing do not meet the “atypical and significant hardship” required to implicate a liberty interest).

56. *See Giano v. Selsky*, 238 F.3d 223, 226 (2d Cir. 2001) (finding that an aggregated period of confinement in administrative segregation of 762 days is a “sufficient departure from the ordinary incidents of prison life to require

One reason it is so difficult to succeed on a Fourteenth Amendment claim is that even where the court finds a liberty interest, a prisoner will still lose his case if the prison's policies satisfy due process (remember that the Fourteenth Amendment does not protect you from any deprivation of liberty, but only those undertaken without due process of law). In *Wilkinson v. Austin*, the Supreme Court found that prisoners had a protected liberty interest in avoiding placement in a Supermax facility which imposed "atypical and significant hardships" on the prisoners such as twenty three hours in their cells, non-contact visits, and indefinite placement.<sup>57</sup> While the court recognized the liberty interest for prisoners, they still upheld the prison's procedural policies as satisfying due process.<sup>58</sup> The Court also clarified that the liberty interest protected—an interest in avoiding transfer to a higher level of confinement—is not created by the Constitution, but instead produced by state policies and regulations.<sup>59</sup>

Classification that affects parole eligibility may also establish a liberty interest. For example, you may have an argument that you would be eligible for parole, were it not for your incorrect classification. In *Wilkinson*, the court considered the fact that prisoners lost their eligibility for parole while incarcerated at the Supermax facility in addition to the factors listed above and found that together they resulted in atypical and significant hardships.<sup>60</sup>

You may also be able to challenge your classification in state court on the grounds that prison officials gave you an unfair classification based on their evaluation of the information contained in the Commitment Paper, the Pre-Sentence Report ("PSR"), warrants, the DCJS Summary Case History ("Rap Sheet"), sentencing minutes, the interview, or any available Department records of a prior DOCS term. It may be possible to convince the court that some of the information contained in these documents was incorrect, or that a clerical error was made in transferring the information from these documents onto a classification worksheet or into a computer program. If an error like this was made, any security classification based on them was not only unfair, but also invalid, because it would be based on false information.<sup>61</sup> Be aware that you may face difficulties in obtaining these documents for review, and that you may be unsuccessful in doing so even if you bring the matter to court.<sup>62</sup>

---

procedural due process protections under *Sandin*" (quoting *Colon v. Howard*, 215 F.3d 227, 231 (2d Cir. 2000))). In New York, at least, when looking at whether placement in administrative segregation constitutes an "atypical and significant" hardship, federal courts will aggregate separate special housing unit ("SHU") and disciplinary segregation sentences where they constitute a sustained period of confinement. *Sims v. Artuz*, 230 F.3d 14, 23–24 (2d Cir. 2000). This means they will consider time spent in administrative segregation, regardless of whether it was in a different facility, if the confinement is continuous. In *Giano*, for instance, the court combined the prisoner's 92-day confinement at one institution with his 670-day confinement at another. *Giano v. Selsky*, 238 F.3d 223, 226 (2d Cir. 2001). *But see Smart v. Goord*, No. 04 Civ. 8850(RWS), 2008 WL 591230, at \*3 (S.D.N.Y. 2008) (*unpublished*) (not finding a due process violation and denying to aggregate sentences because the two periods were not identical and not due to the same rationale, one was for the plaintiff's own protection while the other for possession of contraband).

57. *Wilkinson v. Austin*, 545 U.S. 209, 220, 125 S. Ct. 2384, 2393, 162 L. Ed. 2d 174, 188 (2005).

58. *Wilkinson v. Austin*, 545 U.S. 209, 230, 125 S. Ct. 2384, 2398, 162 L. Ed. 2d 174, 193 (2005).

59. *Wilkinson v. Austin*, 545 U.S. 209, 222, 125 S. Ct. 2384, 2394, 162 L. Ed. 2d 174, 189 (2005).

60. *Wilkinson v. Austin*, 545 U.S. 209, 224, 125 S. Ct. 2384, 2395, 162 L. Ed. 2d 174, 190 (2005) (finding that each factor on its own may not be enough to constitute "atypical and significant hardship" but taken together they do); *see also Neal v. Shimoda*, 131 F.3d 818, 828–30 (9th Cir. 1997) (holding that classification as a sex offender deprived prisoner of a liberty interest where refusing sex offender treatment made one ineligible for parole).

61. *Udzinski v. Coughlin*, 592 N.Y.S.2d 801, 802, 188 A.D.2d 716, 717 (3d Dept. 1992) (ordering that petitioner's crime and sentence report, upon which his security classification was based, be corrected because Department of Correctional Services employees inaccurately transcribed information from pre-sentence report into their own documents).

62. In New York, N.Y. Crim. Proc. 390.50 (McKinney 2010 and Supp. 2011) provides for the confidentiality of pre-sentence reports (meaning that such reports "may not be made available to any person or public or private agency"), except where disclosure is permitted or required by statute or "specific authorization of the court." Where there is no relevant statutory provision, a prisoner may obtain a copy of the report "upon a proper factual showing for the need thereof." *Shader v. People*, 233 A.D.2d 717, 717, 650 N.Y.S.2d 350, 351 (3d Dept. 1996). *See, e.g., Kilgore v. People*, 274 A.D.2d 636, 636, 710 N.Y.S.2d 690, 691 (3d Dept. 2000) (finding petitioner's bare assertion that he required the pre-sentence report in order to properly prepare for an appearance before the Board of Parole is insufficient to constitute a showing of need for the report); *cf. Gutkaiss v. People*, 49 A.D.3d 979, 979–80, 853 N.Y.S.2d 677, 678 (3d Dept. 2008) (finding that the petitioner had made a proper factual showing entitling him to a copy of the report where "petitioner had notice of an impending hearing before the Board and his presentence report was one of the factors to be considered by the Board in determining his application for release"). Cal. Code Regs. tit. 15, § 3375(j) (1)–(4) (2009) (detailing procedures for discussion of presentencing materials and requiring that prisoner's intending to challenge any of the information collected on their intake form provide necessary documentation to support their challenge).

Again, there is generally no federal law in this area, but state law may permit suit based on violations of state law and state-created liberty interests, or prison regulations. Even in state courts, however, it may still be difficult to succeed on your claim. In California, courts have given a great deal of deference to the classification decisions of prison officials, limiting judicial intervention to instances when “actions by prison officials are arbitrary, capricious, irrational, or an abuse of the discretion granted those given the responsibility for operating prisons.”<sup>63</sup>

## 8. Administrative Options

Courts generally don't like to interfere with security classification, and therefore the most realistic approach to getting your classification lowered may be through your prison's internal appeals process. Keep in mind that an unsuccessful federal lawsuit could have consequences for you under the Prison Litigation Reform Act (“PLRA”).<sup>64</sup> Additionally, the PLRA requires that you exhaust administrative options before bringing a legal action under Section 1983.<sup>65</sup> Be sure to read Chapter 14 of the *JLM*, “The Prison Litigation Reform Act.”

No matter where you are incarcerated, your security classification should be periodically reviewed. You should notify your assigned counselor of any information that you think could impact your security classification, such as a change in your rap sheet. You should also give copies of any relevant documents to your counselor. You will need to research the administrative rules in your prison regarding appeals of security classification. For example, in California you are able to contest classification decisions resulting in adverse effects (such as an increased custody level) during your reclassification hearing, and are then able to appeal your score and hearing results to your prison's Classification Committee.<sup>66</sup>

Finally, if you have exhausted all of the internal administrative options, and you are imprisoned in the state of New York, you can begin an Article 78 court proceeding. Article 78 provides a way to challenge administrative decisions in court. Article 78 only applies to the state of New York, but if you are imprisoned elsewhere, you should research whether or not your state has a similar law.<sup>67</sup> For detailed instructions on bringing an Article 78 proceeding, see Chapter 22 of the *JLM*, “How to Challenge Administrative Decisions Using Article 78 of the New York Civil Practice Law and Rules.” *There are very strict rules and time limits* to remember when bringing an Article 78 proceeding, so it is important that you read Chapter 22 carefully.

## C. Gang Validation

### 1. Definition and Discussion

Gang validation is the process by which prison officials determine that a prisoner is an associate or a member of a gang or Security Threat Group (“STG”). Once that decision has been made, the prisoner is often “administratively segregated,” meaning that he is housed separately from, and receives different treatment than prisoners who have not been validated as gang members or associates. Although the specific procedures vary from state to state, Arizona, California, Colorado, Connecticut, Florida, Illinois, Massachusetts, Michigan, Nebraska, New Jersey, Oregon, Tennessee, Texas, and Wisconsin all segregate suspected gang members from the rest of the prison population.<sup>68</sup> While a state prison system may use a standard written

---

63. *In re Wilson*, 202 Cal. App. 3d 661, 667–670, 249 Cal. Rptr. 36, 40–1 (Cal. Ct. App. 1988) (finding that there was a basis for a prisoner's classification as a sex offender even when the related charges had been dismissed, and therefore that prison officials did not act arbitrarily or capriciously when they classified prisoner as a sex offender).

64. For example, if you do not exhaust your administrative remedies, your case will be dismissed rather than stayed (held pending exhaustion). See Chapter 14 of the *JLM*, “The Prison Litigation Reform Act,” for more information on the PLRA.

65. The Prison Litigation Reform Act, 42 U.S.C. § 1997e (a) (2006).

66. State of California, Department of Corrections & Rehabilitation, Operations Manual § 62010.4.2.1 (2004), available at [http://www.cdcr.ca.gov/Regulations/Adult\\_Operations/docs/DOM/DOM\\_Ch\\_6-Printed\\_Final.pdf](http://www.cdcr.ca.gov/Regulations/Adult_Operations/docs/DOM/DOM_Ch_6-Printed_Final.pdf) (last visited November 6, 2011).

67. See, e.g., Fl. Statutes Ann. §120.68 (West 2009); Cal. Gov't Code §53069.4 (West 2009). Similarly to Article 78 of the New York Civil Practice Law and Rules, most state statutes contain strict time limitations on when you can challenge administrative proceedings in court, so be sure to read your own state's rules carefully.

68. See Ariz. Dept. of Corr., Dept. Order No. 806, Security Threat Groups (2009), available at <http://www.azcorrections.gov/Policies/800/0806.pdf> (last visited November 6, 2011); Cal. Admin. Code tit. 15, § 3341.5 (2009); Colo. Dept. of Corr., Admin. Reg. No. 600-07 (2009), available at [http://www.doc.state.co.us/sites/default/files/ar/0600\\_07\\_110111.pdf](http://www.doc.state.co.us/sites/default/files/ar/0600_07_110111.pdf) (last visited November 6, 2011); Conn. Dept. of Corr. Admin., Directive No. 6.14 (2009), available at <http://www.ct.gov/doc/lib/doc/PDF/ad/ad0614.pdf> (last visited November 6, 2011); Fla. Dept. of Corr., Gang

definition of what constitutes a gang member, the process for actually proving that someone is a gang member, and the amount of proof required, may vary by state.<sup>69</sup>

Generally, the only way to be declassified as a gang member is to “debrief.” “Debriefing” is a process that may involve informing prison officials of the identities and activities of fellow gang members. Debriefing can place the suspected gang member’s well-being at risk, and expose him to retaliation. This Section discusses the problems that individuals who have tried to challenge their gang validation in court have experienced, and offers some suggestions for challenging gang validation through administrative proceedings rather than in court.

California’s system of gang validation is one of the most developed and punitive in the country. California has been segregating suspected gang members since at least 1984, and other states have studied California in developing gang validation procedures of their own.<sup>70</sup> In California, and states with similar procedures, you are validated as a gang member if you are found to meet any three of several criteria.<sup>71</sup> These criteria include, but are not limited to gang tattoos, correspondence to or from known gang members or correspondence that contains references to gang activity, wearing gang colors, association with known gang members, possession of gang-related literature, possession of a photograph of known gang members, and identification by a fellow prisoner as a gang member. Misconduct is not necessarily required to be labeled a gang member.

Florida uses the term Security Threat Group (“STG”) which includes “formal or informal ongoing groups, gangs, organization[sic] or associations consisting of three or more members who have a common name or common identifying signs, colors, or symbols. A group whose members/associates engage in a pattern of gang activity or department rule violation.”<sup>72</sup> Similar to California, Florida defines a “criminal gang member” as a person who meets two or more criteria (modification problem in original sentence, as “criminal gang member” would be modifying California. These criteria include, but are not limited to self-identification as a criminal gang member, identification as a criminal gang member by a parent or guardian, identification by a documented reliable informant, adopting the style of dress of a criminal gang, adopting the use of a hand sign identified as used by a criminal gang, having a tattoo identified as used by a criminal gang, and associating with one or more know criminal gang members.<sup>73</sup>

New York State uses the label “Security Risk Group” and defines a gang, for the purposes of its rules, as “a group of individuals, having a common identifying name, sign, symbol or colors who have engaged in a pattern of lawlessness” such as violence, destruction of property, threats, intimidation, harm, or drug smuggling. Prisoners are prohibited from wearing, possessing, or distributing gang materials or insignia (identifying marks or symbols of the gang) or participating in gang-related activities or meetings.<sup>74</sup>

Most of the case law on gang validation comes from California, where prisoners have been most active in using the courts to challenge their classification as gang members. For that reason, the following discussion

---

and Security Threat Group Awareness, available at <http://www.dc.state.fl.us/pub/gangs/index.html> (last visited November 6, 2011); Ill. Admin. Code tit. 20, § 505.40 (2010); 103 Mass. Code Regs. 421.09 (1994), available at <http://www.mass.gov/Eeops/docs/doc/policies/421.pdf> (last visited November 6, 2011); Mich. Dept. of Corr., Pol’y Directive No. 04.04.113 (2010), available at [http://www.michigan.gov/documents/corrections/0404113\\_337350\\_7.pdf](http://www.michigan.gov/documents/corrections/0404113_337350_7.pdf) (last visited November 6, 2011); Neb. Corr. Servs., Admin. Reg. No. 201.05 (2010), available at <http://www.corrections.state.ne.us/pdf/ar/classification/AR%20201.05.pdf> (last visited November 6, 2011); N.J. Admin. Code tit. 10A, § 5-6.3 (2008); Or. Admin. R. 291-069-0270 (2008); Tenn. Dept. of Corr. Admin., Pol’y No. 404.10 (2007), available at <http://www.tennessee.gov/correction/pdf/404-10.pdf> (last visited November 6, 2011); Tex. Dept. of Corr., Offender Orientation Handbook 26 (2004), available at [http://www.tdcj.state.tx.us/documents/Offender\\_Orientation\\_Handbook\\_English.pdf](http://www.tdcj.state.tx.us/documents/Offender_Orientation_Handbook_English.pdf) (last visited November 6, 2011); Wis. Admin. Code DOC § 308.04(2)(d) (2008), available at <http://www.legis.state.wi.us/rsb/code/doc/doc308.pdf> (last visited November 6, 2011).

69. Claire Johnson et al., Nat’l Criminal Justice Reference Serv., *Prosecuting Gangs: A National Assessment* (1995), available at <http://www.ncjrs.gov/txtfiles/pgang.txt> (last visited November 6, 2011).

70. Scott N. Tachiki, *Indeterminate Sentences in Supermax Prisons Based Upon Alleged Gang Affiliations: A Reexamination of Procedural Protection and a Proposal for Greater Procedural Requirements*, 83 Cal. L. Rev. 1115, 1129 (1995).

71. *Madrid v. Gomez*, 889 F. Supp. 1146, 1242 (N.D. Cal. 1995) (quoting the California Department of Corrections Operations Manual § 55070.19.2 which requires at least three “original, independent source items of documentation indicative of actual membership” in a gang).

72. See Fla. Dept. of Corr., *Frequently Asked Questions - - Gang and Security Threat Group Awareness*, available at <http://www.dc.state.fl.us/pub/gangs/faq.html> (last visited November 5, 2011).

73. See Fla. Dept. of Corr., *Frequently Asked Questions - - Gang and Security Threat Group Awareness*, available at <http://www.dc.state.fl.us/pub/gangs/faq.html> (last visited November 5, 2011).

74. N.Y. Comp. Codes R. & Regs. tit. 7, § 270.2(B)(6)(iv) (2008).

addresses claims regarding gang validation that have been filed in California, both in state and federal court. Federal courts have generally not been receptive to prisoner claims, declining to decide whether prisoners have a constitutionally protected “liberty interest” in being classified a particular way. Instead, courts have found that the due process afforded to prisoners by the California system would be sufficient even if such an interest was found to exist.<sup>75</sup> For this reason, the courts have rejected Fourteenth Amendment claims that classification as a gang member violates a prisoner’s right to due process.<sup>76</sup> The courts have also rejected Eighth Amendment claims that the debriefing requirement subjects a prisoner to cruel or unusual punishment,<sup>77</sup> and claims that classification as a gang member violates a prisoner’s Fifth Amendment protection from self-incrimination.<sup>78</sup> The courts have generally found that prison officials should be granted broad discretion in such administrative matters, and the California courts have dismissed most gang validation complaints at the summary judgment stage (meaning that the prisoner was not able to reach the full trial stage).

In a recent New York case, a prisoner was unsuccessful in his attempt to challenge his classification as a member of a Security Risk Group (“SRG”) based on his being observed greeting another prisoner with gang signs. In that case, the court found gang validation and classification as a member of a SRG to be “merely an observation tool” that does not result in a loss of liberty.<sup>79</sup>

Before you bring any action, you should consider the possibility that the court where you argue your case will follow the lead of the California courts. You should also consider the implications that dismissal of your case could have for you under the Prison Litigation Reform Act.<sup>80</sup> Finally, before taking any action, it is important that you also read Part B of this Chapter, which is devoted to general security classification and contains additional information that you may find relevant.

## 2. Fourteenth Amendment Claims

The Due Process Clause of the Fourteenth Amendment protects individuals, including prisoners, from loss of “life, liberty, or property” at the hands of government without due process of law.<sup>81</sup> However, courts in California have found that administrative segregation does not violate the Due Process Clause. They have generally determined that it is not necessary to decide whether a prisoner has a valid state-created liberty interest in being free from administrative confinement because the due process provided to prisoners by the California system would be sufficient even if this liberty interest were found to exist.<sup>82</sup>

---

75. *Castañeda v. Marshall*, No. C-93-03118 CW, 1997 U.S. Dist. LEXIS 4612, at \*22 (N.D. Cal. Mar. 10, 1997) (*unpublished*) (finding no due process violation because the prisoner plaintiff received notice of his classification and continuing placement in the security housing unit, and his placement there was based on reliable information), *aff’d*, No. 97-15538, 1998 U.S. App. LEXIS 8184 (9th Cir. Apr. 20, 1998) (*unpublished*); *Galvaldon v. Marshall*, No. C-95-1674-MHP, 1997 U.S. Dist. LEXIS 21500, at \*17–23 (N.D. Cal. Nov. 12, 1997) (*unpublished*) (finding no due process violation because the prisoner plaintiff had an opportunity to present his views to the Criminal Activities Coordinator, the prisoner’s status was based on sufficient and reliable evidence, and his status was given periodic review).

76. *Castañeda v. Marshall*, No. C-93-03118 CW, 1997 U.S. Dist. LEXIS 4612, at \*22 (N.D. Cal. Mar. 10, 1997) (*unpublished*), *aff’d*, No. 97-15538, 1998 U.S. App. LEXIS 8184 (9th Cir. Apr. 20, 1998) (*unpublished*); *Galvaldon v. Marshall*, No. C-95-1674-MHP, 1997 U.S. Dist. LEXIS 21500, at \*17–23 (N.D. Cal. Nov. 12, 1997) (*unpublished*).

77. *Castañeda v. Marshall*, No. C-93-03118 CW, 1997 U.S. Dist. LEXIS 4612, at \*25–26 (N.D. Cal. Mar. 10, 1997) (*unpublished*), *aff’d*, No. 97-15538, 1998 U.S. App. LEXIS 8184 (9th Cir. Apr. 20, 1998) (*unpublished*).

78. *Griffin v. Gomez*, No. C-92-1236 EFL, 1995 U.S. Dist. LEXIS 9263, at \*17–18 (N.D. Cal. June 29, 1995) (*unpublished*), *aff’d in part and rev’d in part on other grounds*, No. 95-16684, 1998 U.S. App. LEXIS 3152 (9th Cir. Feb. 24, 1998) (*unpublished*); *Castañeda v. Marshall*, No. C-93-03118 CW, 1997 U.S. Dist. LEXIS 4612, at \*23–24 (N.D. Cal. Mar. 10, 1997) (*unpublished*), *aff’d*, No. 97-15538, 1998 U.S. App. LEXIS 8184 (9th Cir. Apr. 20, 1998) (*unpublished*); *Medina v. Gomez*, No. C-93-1774 TEH, 1997 U.S. Dist. LEXIS 12208, at \*15-16 (N.D. Cal. Aug. 14, 1997) (*unpublished*).

79. *Arriaga v. City of New York*, No. 06 Civ. 2362 (PKC) (HBP), 2008 U.S. Dist. LEXIS 41433, at \*20–21 (S.D.N.Y. May 20, 2008) (*unpublished*).

80. For example, if you do not exhaust your administrative remedies, your case will be dismissed rather than stayed (held pending exhaustion). See Chapter 14 of the *JLM*, “The Prison Litigation Reform Act,” for more information on the PLRA.

81. U.S. Const. amend. XIV, § 1. For a more detailed discussion of liberty interests and the degree of due process rights owed to prisoners, see Chapter 18 of the *JLM*, “Your Rights at Prison Disciplinary Hearings.”

82. *Castañeda v. Marshall*, No. C-93-03118 CW, 1997 U.S. Dist. LEXIS 4612, at \*22 (N.D. Cal. Mar. 10, 1997) (*unpublished*), *aff’d*, No. 97-15538, 1998 U.S. App. LEXIS 8184 (9th Cir. Apr. 20, 1998) (*unpublished*); *Galvaldon v. Marshall*, No. C-95-1674-MHP, 1997 U.S. Dist. LEXIS 21500, at \*17–23 (N.D. Cal. Nov. 12, 1997) (*unpublished*).

In California, the due process provided in classification and administrative segregation proceedings is considered adequate. The courts have found that California procedures provide the prisoner with some notice of the charges against him. The procedures also provide him with an opportunity to present his views and concerns to the official charged with deciding whether or not to transfer him to administrative segregation. Due process requires that, following a prisoner's administrative segregation, officials must also engage in some sort of periodic review of his confinement.<sup>83</sup> Although prison officials are not required by due process to provide the names of their sources of information in validating a suspected gang member, if they fail to do so, the record must contain a prison official's statement that safety considerations prevented the disclosure of the informant's name.<sup>84</sup>

The Ninth Circuit has found that the Due Process Clause does *not* require:

- (1) Detailed written notice of charges;
- (2) Representation by counsel or counsel-substitute;
- (3) An opportunity to present witnesses;
- (4) A written description of the reasons for placing the prisoner in administrative segregation; or
- (5) The disclosure of the identity of any person providing information leading to the placement of the prisoner in administrative segregation.<sup>85</sup>

Placement in segregation for an indeterminate period based upon gang membership does not require any procedure or protections beyond those required in regular administrative segregation cases.<sup>86</sup> However, a prisoner may not be confined separately for gang affiliation unless the record contains *some factual information* from which prison officials can reasonably conclude that the information supporting segregation is reliable.<sup>87</sup> In California, under statute, information is considered reliable if one of the following five criteria is met:

- (1) The confidential informant has previously given information that has proven to be true;
- (2) Other confidential sources have independently provided the same information;
- (3) Other information provided by the confidential informant is self-incriminating;
- (4) Part of the information provided is corroborated (confirmed) through investigation or information by non-confidential sources; or
- (5) The confidential informant is the victim.<sup>88</sup>

---

83. *Rojas v. Cambra*, No. C 96-2990 VRW, 1997 U.S. Dist. LEXIS 7610, at \*11 (N.D. Cal. May 20, 1997) (*unpublished*); *Castañeda v. Marshall*, No. C-93-03118 CW, 1997 U.S. Dist. LEXIS 4612, at \*13 (N.D. Cal. Mar. 10, 1997) (*unpublished*), *aff'd*, No. 97-15538, 1998 U.S. App. LEXIS 8184 (9th Cir. Apr. 20, 1998) (*unpublished*); *see also* *Hewitt v. Helms*, 459 U.S. 460, 477 n.9, 103 S. Ct. 864, 874 n.9, 74 L. Ed. 2d 675, 692 n.9 (1983) (noting that prison administrators must engage in some sort of periodic review of whether the prisoner remains a security threat), *as modified by Sandin v. Conner*, 515 U.S. 472, 115 S. Ct. 2293, 132 L. Ed. 2d 418 (1995).

84. *See* *Zimmerlee v. Keeney*, 831 F.2d 183, 186 (9th Cir. 1987) (holding that due process requires the affirmative statement of a prison official where safety considerations prevent the disclosure of the informant's name and additional facts to show that the information was reliable); *Castañeda v. Marshall*, No. C-93-03118 CW, 1997 U.S. Dist. LEXIS 4612, at \*16 n.6 (N.D. Cal. Mar. 10, 1997) (*unpublished*) (finding that prison officials must include a statement that the informant's name was not included for safety purposes), *aff'd*, No. 97-15538, 1998 U.S. App. LEXIS 8184 (9th Cir. Apr. 20, 1998) (*unpublished*).

85. *Toussaint v. McCarthy*, 801 F.2d 1080, 1100-01 (9th Cir. 1986); *Medina v. Gomez*, No. C-93-1774 TEH, 1997 U.S. Dist. LEXIS 12208, at \*9 (N.D. Cal. Aug. 14, 1997) (*unpublished*); *Castañeda v. Marshall*, No. C-93-03118 CW, 1997 U.S. Dist. LEXIS 4612, at \*13 (N.D. Cal. Mar. 10, 1997) (*unpublished*), *aff'd*, No. 97-15538, 1998 U.S. App. LEXIS 8184 (9th Cir. Apr. 20, 1998) (*unpublished*).

86. *Madrid v. Gomez*, 889 F. Supp. 1146, 1275 (N.D. Cal. 1995) (holding that in order to satisfy due process, a prisoner cannot be segregated for gang affiliation unless the record contains "some factual information" sufficient to satisfy the reliability standard used in other administrative segregation proceedings); *see also* *Rojas v. Cambra*, No. C 96-2990 VRW, 1997 U.S. Dist. LEXIS 7610, at \*8-9 (N.D. Cal. May 20, 1997) (*unpublished*).

87. *Madrid v. Gomez*, 889 F. Supp. 1146, 1274 (N.D. Cal. 1995); *see also* *Koch v. Lewis*, 96 F. Supp. 2d 949, 965 (D. Ariz. 2000) (noting that there must be some reliable evidence of current gang/STG membership before the state may impose indefinite administrative segregation), *vacated as moot*, *Koch v. Schriro*, 399 F.3d 1099 (9th Cir. 2005); *accord*, *Taylor v. Rodriguez*, 238 F.3d 188, 193 (2d Cir. 2001) (holding that there must be specific facts to support administrative segregation based on gang membership). *Contra*, *Austin v. Wilkinson*, 372 F.3d 346, 356 (6th Cir. 2004) (holding there is no procedural due process requirement of recent gang activity, though there might be a substantive requirement), *aff'd in part, rev'd in part on other grounds*, 545 U.S. 209, 125 S. Ct. 2384, 162 L. Ed. 2d 174 (2005).

88. Cal. Code Regs. tit. 15, § 3321(c) (2012).

Finally, a further due process related claim that you might make is that your validation as a gang member has been made in retaliation for some other unrelated legal activity that you have engaged in, such as filing an appeal. To state the *prima facie* case,<sup>89</sup> you have the burden of showing that retaliation for the exercise of protected conduct was the “substantial” or “motivating” factor behind the prison officials’ conduct.<sup>90</sup> Additionally, you must show that the retaliatory action did not advance legitimate prison management or prisoner treatment goals (referred to as “penological goals”),<sup>91</sup> or was not “narrowly tailored” enough to achieve such goals. Arbitrary targeting of prisoners for gang validation is not an action that is narrowly tailored to achieve legitimate penological goals. For example, you might try to argue that gang validations without good cause actually misdirect prison resources away from other proceedings and compromise prison security.<sup>92</sup> Once you have established a *prima facie* case of retaliation and demonstrated that the retaliatory action does not advance a legitimate penological goal, the burden shifts to the prison officials to establish that they would have validated you as a gang member even if you had not engaged in the legally protected conduct.

### 3. Eighth Amendment Claims

The Eighth Amendment of the Constitution prohibits “the unnecessary and wanton infliction of pain”<sup>93</sup> and punishment that is “grossly out of proportion to the severity of the crime.”<sup>94</sup> California courts have rejected the argument that the debriefing process<sup>95</sup> constitutes an Eighth Amendment violation because it could subject a prisoner to retaliation from other gang members, thereby placing his life and well-being at risk. They have generally found this allegation to be speculative, and courts will not allow this argument to go forward without evidence of a particular threat to the prisoner bringing the case, or without evidence that prison officials are not concerned about the prisoner’s well-being.<sup>96</sup>

### 4. Fifth Amendment Claims

The Fifth Amendment of the Constitution provides that no person “shall be compelled in any criminal case to be a witness against himself.”<sup>97</sup> Debriefing generally requires a prisoner to disclose information regarding himself and other gang members and their gang-related activities. Prison administrators have argued, and courts have agreed, that debriefing is necessary to determine whether a prisoner is telling the truth about no longer being a part of the gang. It has also been argued that debriefing helps to determine if a gang member’s information is reliable and to gather further information about the gang.<sup>98</sup>

89. To state a *prima facie* case is to state sufficient facts to allow the judge or jury to find in your favor if everything you said is true and undisputed.

90. Koch v. Lewis, 96 F. Supp. 2d 949, 956 (D. Ariz. 2000), *vacated as moot*, Koch v. Schriro, 399 F.3d 1099 (9th Cir. 2005). See Chapter 24 of the *JLM*, “Your Right To Be Free from Assault,” for more information on your rights against retaliation.

91. See Chapter 16 of the *JLM*, “Using 42 U.S.C. § 1983 and 28 U.S.C. § 1331 to Obtain Relief From Violations of Federal Law,” and Chapter 27 of the *JLM*, “Religious Freedom in Prison,” for more information on the “legitimate penological goals” language and the *Turner* standard.

92. See, e.g., Koch v. Lewis, 96 F. Supp. 2d 949, 956 (D. Ariz. 2000) (“instituting STG proceedings without good cause would misdirect prison resources away from proceedings involving a legitimate compromise to prison security”), *vacated as moot*, Koch v. Schriro, 399 F.3d 1099 (9th Cir. 2005). While an argument of wasting prison resources was effective in Koch, many other courts have held that gang validation supports the goal of prison security. See, e.g., Stewart v. Alameida, 418 F. Supp.2d 1154, 1163 (N.D. Cal. 2006) (finding the prison’s regulations on gang validation did not violate the prisoner’s rights because the regulations were reasonably related to the valid penological interest of security).

93. Rhodes v. Chapman, 452 U.S. 337, 346, 101 S. Ct. 2392, 2399, 69 L. Ed. 2d 59, 68 (1981) (quoting Gregg v. Georgia, 428 U.S. 153, 173, 96 S. Ct. 2909, 2925, 49 L. Ed. 2d 859, 875 (1976)).

94. Rhodes v. Chapman, 452 U.S. 337, 346, 101 S. Ct. 2392, 2399, 69 L. Ed. 2d 59, 68 (1981) (quoting Coker v. Georgia, 433 U.S. 584, 592, 97 S. Ct. 2861, 2866, 53 L. Ed. 2d 982, 989 (1977) (plurality opinion)).

95. For more on debriefing, see Part C(4) of this Chapter.

96. Berg v. Kincheloe, 794 F.2d 457, 459 (9th Cir. 1986) (stating that a prisoner may bring a §1983 claim under the Eighth Amendment if it is shown that prison officials acted with “deliberate indifference” to a serious threat of harm to a prisoner by another prisoner); *followed by* Pollard v. GEO Group, Inc., 629 F.3d 843, 863 (9th Cir. 2010).

97. U.S. Const. amend. V.

98. Medina v. Gomez, 889 F. Supp. 1146, 1241 (N.D. Cal. 1995) (“Because prison gang members ‘join for life,’ the CDC considers debriefings necessary to prove the renunciations of gang memberships are genuine.”).

California courts have held that the Fifth Amendment protection against self-incrimination is not violated by the debriefing requirement because the information acquired in debriefing is not (under California's policy) used in later criminal proceedings.<sup>99</sup> Courts have held that the right against self-incrimination "does not arise in the debriefing processing," and therefore that prison officials are not required to provide prisoners with immunity.<sup>100</sup> Remember that the right against self-incrimination is a personal protection and may not be invoked to prevent the implication of others, such as other people involved in the gang.

Keep in mind, however, that as a California prisoner, the policies surrounding debriefing provide you with only thin protection. Although the regulations state that debriefing is "not for the purpose of acquiring incriminating evidence against the subject,"<sup>101</sup> they do not explicitly forbid the evidence being used in later legal proceedings. Partly as a result of prisoners challenging the debriefing process, the regulations also provide that if a prisoner "makes a statement that tends to incriminate [himself] in a crime," he must waive his right against self-incrimination "prior to questioning . . . about the incriminating matter."<sup>102</sup> However, the prison official or gang investigator conducting the debriefing determines when a statement "tends to incriminate," and the debriefing prisoner has no attorney or representative present at the debriefing. If you are currently appealing your conviction or sentence and considering debriefing, you should talk to your appellate attorney about the possible implications debriefing may have on your appeal.

If you are not in California, it may be worth investigating whether or not the system in which you are incarcerated has a policy regarding the use of information gathered through gang debriefings in future criminal proceedings. If it does not have such a policy, then the debriefing requirement may present a valid Fifth Amendment issue.

## 5. Equal Protection and Free Exercise of Religion Claims

To prevail on an equal protection claim, a prisoner usually must prove: (1) that the government has intentionally treated similarly situated prisoners differently and (2) that there is no rational relationship between this dissimilar treatment and any legitimate penal interest.<sup>103</sup> This standard is frequently called "rational basis review." Rational basis review is the lowest level of scrutiny applied by courts. Prisoner challenges to classifications usually fail because officials only need to show that the action is rationally related to a legitimate government interest. If, however, you are alleging that you were treated differently than other, similarly situated prisoners *because of your race*, some courts, including California, will apply "strict scrutiny" to the government's policy. "Strict scrutiny" is a significantly higher standard than "rational basis review," and therefore more difficult for the government to meet (and more favorable to prisoners). To survive "strict scrutiny," the government must prove that the treatment you are challenging both: (1) promotes a compelling state interest; and (2) is narrowly or suitably tailored to that interest.<sup>104</sup>

---

99. Griffin v. Gomez, No C-92-1236 EFL, 1995 U.S. Dist. LEXIS 9263, at \*8–11 (N.D. Cal. June 29, 1995) (*unpublished*), *aff'd in part and rev'd in part on other grounds*, No. 95-16684, 1998 U.S. App. LEXIS 3152 (9th Cir. Feb. 24, 1998) (*unpublished*); Castañeda v. Marshall, No. C-93-03118 CW, 1997 U.S. Dist. LEXIS 4612, at \*23–24 (N.D. Cal. Mar. 10, 1997) (*unpublished*), *aff'd*, No. 97-15538, 1998 U.S. App. LEXIS 8184 (9th Cir. Apr. 20, 1998) (*unpublished*); Medina v. Gomez, No. C-93-1774 TEH, 1997 U.S. Dist. LEXIS 12208, at \*16 (N.D. Cal. Aug. 14, 1997) (*unpublished*).

100. Griffin v. Gomez, No. C-92-1236 EFL, 1995 U.S. Dist. LEXIS 9263, at \*19 (N.D. Cal. June 29, 1995) (*unpublished*), *aff'd in part and rev'd in part on other grounds*, No. 95-16684, 1998 U.S. App. LEXIS 3152 (9th Cir. Feb. 24, 1998) (*unpublished*).

101. Cal. Code Regs. tit. 15, § 3378.1(b) (2012).

102. Cal. Code Regs. tit. 15, § 3378.2 (2012).

103. Harbin-Bey v. Rutter, 420 F.3d 571, 576 (6th Cir. 2005); *see* Turner v. Safley, 482 U.S. 78, 89, 107 S. Ct. 2254, 2261, 96 L. Ed. 2d 64, 79 (1987) (establishing the "legitimate penological interests" test to validate prison regulations that may otherwise impinge a prisoner's constitutional rights); *see also* Ashelman v. Wawrzaszek, 111 F.3d 674, 676 (9th Cir. 1997) (noting that the Turner "legitimate penological interests" test may not apply to certain religious discrimination cases under the "compelling government interest" test required by the Religious Freedom Restoration Act of 1993, 42 U.S.C. § 2000bb-1).

104. Johnson v. California, 543 U.S. 499, 505, 125 S. Ct. 1141, 1146, 160 L. Ed. 2d 949, 958 (2005); *see also* Parents Involved in Cmty. Sch. v. Seattle Sch. Dist. No. 1, 551 U.S. 701, 720, 127 S. Ct. 2746, 2752, 168 L. Ed. 2d 517, 523 (2007) (using the strict scrutiny standard in the context of race-conscious student assignment policies designed to eliminate racial imbalances in school enrollment); Jana-Rock Construction, Inc. v. N.Y. State Dept. of Econ. Dev., 438 F.3d 195, 205 (2d Cir. 2006) (clarifying that extrinsic showing of discriminatory animus or effect is not necessary to trigger strict scrutiny).

An example of a policy of different treatment based on race was found in *Johnson v. California*.<sup>105</sup> In *Johnson*, the court applied a strict scrutiny standard of review with regard to the prison's policy of placing new or transferred prisoners with cellmates of the same race during the initial sixty-day evaluation period. In *Harbin-Bey v. Rutter*, however, the Sixth Circuit Court of Appeals held that a prison's decision to designate a prisoner as a member of a Security Threat Group without a hearing did not involve different treatment based on race.<sup>106</sup> The court in *Harbin-Bey* held that this policy applied to all prisoners and therefore was not a decision based on race.<sup>107</sup> For more information on Equal Protection claims you should see Chapter 16 of the *JLM*, "Using 42 U.S.C. § 1983 and 28 U.S. § 1331 to Obtain Relief from Violations of Federal Law."

You may be able to argue that the debriefing policy makes it hard to practice your religion. However, these types of claims have failed because the policy does not "substantially burden" free exercise of religion.<sup>108</sup> Using the substantial burden test, a district court in California, in *Rojas v. Cambra*, rejected a challenge where a religious Catholic prisoner argued that the debriefing policy was unconstitutional because it forced him to confess to a person other than a priest. The court held that the policy did not substantially burden the prisoner's religion because the prisoner was not forced to commit any act forbidden by his religion, but instead could refrain from debriefing.<sup>109</sup> For more information on your right to practice your religion see Chapter 27 of the *JLM*, "Religious Freedom in Prison."

## 6. Administrative Options

Given courts' general hostility toward gang validation claims, the most effective way to challenge classification is probably through administrative procedures within the prison. You should be granted periodic review of your status as an alleged gang member, at which time you should have the opportunity to express your views on your classification. This is your opportunity to ensure that officials are following the proper administrative procedures that the California courts have relied upon in dismissing prisoners' due process claims. For example, as discussed above, all anonymous testimony must be accompanied by an official statement that the identity of your accuser has been withheld for security reasons and that testimony should be as complete as it can possibly be without identifying the source. You should become familiar with the classification procedures so that you can monitor whether they are being followed; deviations from the classification may provide grounds for challenging your classification.

Chapter 15 of the *JLM*, "Inmate Grievance Procedures," contains detailed instructions on how to pursue administrative remedies. The focus of Chapter 15 is on the state of New York's Internal Grievance Program ("IGP"), but you will also find information on locating the guidelines and procedures for filing grievances in other states. You may also find Chapter 18 of the *JLM*, "Your Rights at Prison Disciplinary Proceedings," helpful in challenging your classification. Many states separate their disciplinary and classification systems and there may be separate provisions for appealing your classification. It is important that you read the grievance rules carefully so that you can use the correct administrative remedy. Finally, if you have exhausted all of the administrative options and you are imprisoned in the state of New York, you can file an Article 78 proceeding. Article 78 provides a procedure for challenging administrative decisions in court. For instructions on how to bring an Article 78 proceeding, see Chapter 22 of the *JLM*, "How to Challenge Administrative Decisions Using Article 78 of the New York Civil Practice Law and Rules."

## D. Conclusion

Your security classification is important because it influences where you are incarcerated and what sort of freedoms you will receive. If you have undergone gang validation and been designated a member of a Security Threat Group it may be possible to challenge this designation, although such challenges are

---

105. *Johnson v. California*, 543 U.S. 499, 505, 125 S. Ct. 1141, 1146, 160 L. Ed. 2d 949, 958 (2005). *But see* *Medina v. Gomez*, No. C-93-1774 TEH, 1997 U.S. Dist. LEXIS 12208, at \*19 (N.D. Cal. Aug. 14, 1997) (*unpublished*) (holding that debriefing (a procedure in which a prisoner was held in administrative segregation unless he renounced his gang membership) neither "burdens a fundamental right nor targets a suspect class," and was therefore subject to only rational basis and not strict scrutiny review).

106. *Harbin-Bey v. Rutter*, 420 F.3d 571, 576 (6th Cir. 2005).

107. *Harbin-Bey v. Rutter*, 420 F.3d 571, 576 (6th Cir. 2005).

108. *Rojas v. Cambra*, No. C 96-2990 VRW, 1997 U.S. Dist. LEXIS 7610, at \*23 (N.D. Cal. May 20, 1997) (*unpublished*).

109. *Rojas v. Cambra*, No. C 96-2990 VRW, 1997 U.S. Dist. LEXIS 7610, at \*22-23 (N.D. Cal. May 20, 1997) (*unpublished*).

difficult to win. While you may have some room to raise a challenge on equal protection grounds if the prison used a race-based policy to classify you in a certain group, you are probably more likely to be successful challenging your security classification through your prison's administrative procedures.