WEST VIRGINIA CODE: §15A-4-7

§15A-4-7. Monitoring inmate mail; procedures and restrictions; identifying mail from a state institution; mail to or from attorneys excepted.

(a) The commissioner, or his or her designee, is authorized to monitor, open, review, copy, and disclose mail sent to adult inmates of state institutions under his or her control, in accordance with the following provisions:

(1) All adult inmates of state institutions shall be notified in writing that their mail may be monitored, opened, reviewed, copied, and disclosed;

(2) Only the commissioner and his or her designee shall have access to copies of inmates' mail unless disclosed pursuant to §15A-4-7(a)(4) of this code;

(3) Notice that the mail may be monitored shall be prominently placed on or immediately near every mail receptacle or other designated area for the collection or delivery of mail;

(4) The contents of inmate's mail may be disclosed to an appropriate law-enforcement agency, or the West Virginia Intelligence Fusion Center, when disclosure is necessary for the investigation, prevention, or prosecution of a crime or to safeguard the orderly operation of the institution. Disclosure may also be made in civil or administrative proceedings pursuant to an order of a court or administrative tribunal when the disclosure is:

(A) Necessary to safeguard and protect the orderly operation of the institution; or

(B) Necessary to protect persons from physical harm or the threat of physical harm;

(5) All copies of mail shall be retained for at least three years and maintained and destroyed in accordance with the records retention policy of the division adopted as required by §5A-8-1 et seq. of this code; or

(6) The inmate whose mail has been copied and disclosed under this section shall be given a copy of that mail when it is determined by the commissioner, or superintendent, not to jeopardize the safe and secure operation of the facility or to be detrimental to an ongoing investigation or administrative action.

(b) To safeguard the sanctity of the attorney-client privilege, mail to or from an inmate's attorney shall not be monitored, reviewed, copied, and kept by the institution, or disclosed in any manner unless required by an order of a court of competent jurisdiction. However, that mail may be checked for weapons, drugs, and other contraband provided it is done in the presence of the inmate and there is a reasonable basis to believe that any weapon, drug, or other contraband exists in the mail.

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(c) All inmate's outgoing mail must be clearly identified as being sent from an inmate at a state correctional institution and must include on the face of the envelope the name and full address of the institution.

(d) The commissioner or his or her designee is authorized to open, monitor, review, copy, and disclose an inmate's outgoing mail in accordance with the provisions of §5A-4-7(a) of this code.

(e) The commissioner shall promulgate a policy directive establishing a record-keeping procedure which requires retention of: (1) All inmate mail provided to law enforcement; and (2) the name of the law-enforcement officer and the law-enforcement agency to which the inmate mail was provided. The records required to be retained pursuant to this subsection shall be retained in accordance with the record retention policy specified in §15A-4-7(a)(5) of this code. The inmate mail and the information regarding law enforcement are law-enforcement records under §29B-1-4(a)(4) of this code.

(f) Should an inmate be charged with a criminal offense based, in whole or in part, on the inmate's mail supplied to law enforcement, the inmate's attorney in the criminal matter shall be entitled access to and copies of the inmate's mail in the custody of the commissioner which are not evidence in or the subject of another criminal investigation.

(g) The provisions of this section apply only to those persons in the physical custody of the commissioner.

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