

Death Row / Pennsylvania

S.C.I. Greene

This prison was built in a remote location in Greene County, about one hour drive south of Pittsburgh. It opened in 1994, with the Capital Unit opening in 1998 (L Unit). This is a Maximum Security prison, Level 5. There are now only about 160 death row inmates left, with less than 140 here. L Unit has 128 single cells, and is the only Capital Case Unit. There are still about 6 or 7 Capital Case inmates housed over on G and H Units. They have taken away the porter jobs over there from most of the Capital Case inmates, and given them to GEN POP inmates on AC Status (Administrative Custody). We do have a section on L Unit for inmates in the Mental Health Program, but there are three inmates so unruly that they are being housed on G Unit with GEN POP mentally ill.

L Unit is a free-standing building. Cell windows on A Pod and D Pod offer a view of the grass outside where various birds, pigeons, and the now rare rabbit might be seen searching for food. Cell windows on B Pod and half of C Pod face the inner courtyard where are Yard Kennel Cages are surrounded by walls on three sides. Every cell has a sealed barred window that measures 18" across and 48" high. Depending on the direction of your window, you might feel a few hours of direct sunlight, mostly in the summer. The windows on A Pod and D Pod also provide a view of various staff and visitors entering L Unit.

Each cell has a stainless steel shelf and round pedestal that serves as a desk where you eat, write, etc. There is a open metal cabinet mounted on the wall where you store hygiene items, legal property, commissary, etc. Each cell has your standard stainless steel toilet and sink combo, with a metal plate covered in a mirrored surface over it. There is a small shelf over four muted metal hooks near the door where you hang jumpsuits and store prison clothing items.

The bed is a steel shelf bolted in two places to the wall, measuring only 6½ feet long by 2½ feet wide. The mattress is a 4 inch piece of sponge neoprene encased in stiff vinyl. The pillow is a flimsy piece of white polyester encased in vinyl. Each inmate is issued one set of flimsy white sheets and a pillow case and a thin cotton blanket.

Each cell has a solid steel door with two small vertical windows that are 5 inches wide and 20 inches high. These doors serve to keep most noise out of the cell, in comparison to the old cells with spaced bars. They also serve a security purpose, an inmate worker cannot toss anything in your cell like feces, urine, or a lit inflammable. The cell door has a pie hole that a guard unlocks to slide in your food trays at 6:30 A.M., 10:15 A.M. , and 4:00 P.M., all meals eaten alone in your cell. This portal is used to handcuff you behind your back anytime you leave your cell too.

Showers are 10 minutes each on Monday, Wednesday, and Friday. You are cuffed and escorted by guards to the shower wearing only boxers and shower shoes. You are locked inside the stainless steel shower, the size of a phone booth (for young people, GOOGLE phone booth). You are uncuffed. You press a button on a timer, no control over temperature of water.

The ventilation system is a forced air system that uses about 80% recycled air for heat and air conditioning. It rarely works well, and they don't change air filters often enough. Dust accumulates in the cells daily.

We are offered two hours in Law Library once every 8 or 9 days. There are four small cages on the Unit that contain a old computer terminal, a old typewriter, a steel shelf, and a plastic chair. One inmate can sign up another inmate as a partner. There is no Internet, closed database of legal books only. Each inmate in locked in separate cages.

There is no inside recreation. There are 28 Kennel Type cages surrounded by walls on three sides right outside the rear door of L Unit. Gen Pop inmates have multiple Yards outside and inside, 7 days a week, and morning, afternoon, and evening. We are offered two hours, only Monday through Friday. You are handcuffed, taken outside, and released into the cage to walk around or with another inmate agreed upon. Each cage is 22 feet long by 10 feet wide. Some inmates exercise, some walk around, some bounce a basketball, some play checkers, chess, scrabble, or cards. If there is a lightning warning or temperatures below 14 degrees F., or a staff drill, or a shakedown out in GEN POP, our Yard is cancelled. Yard is 7:30 A.M. to 9:30 A.M., rarely is the Sun felt on your face. In warmer months, more inmates sign up for Yard, and you might get second Yard from 11:15 A.M. to 1:15 P.M.

Of the 128 inmates on L Unit, only about 50 or 60% ever leave their cell for Yard or Law Library. Many never even shower or clean their cell. Cell cleaning is Saturday morning. You are only provide a plastic pan of soapy water, a plastic dust pan and bobtail brush, a toilet brush, and a spray bottle of glass cleaner. It is up to the inmate to buy washcloths from Commissary to use as cleaning cloths and use toilet paper to clean windows and mirrored surface.

Most inmates that can afford it purchase detergent to wash things in their cell. The prison laundry is once a week. You must attach underwear and socks to a vinyl strap with plastic clip. It is sent to another prison where it is washed in massive machines overloaded with others items with little detergent, bleach, or even hot water. It is unsanitary.

All visits are non-contact, even with lawyers. Visitors and inmate sit across from each other in a small booth, separated by a glass window with small perforations on the side to transmit voices. Visiting hours are from about 8:30 A.M. until 3:15 P.M., seven days a week.

The prison provides each inmate only 3 sets of underwear and socks, that do not hold up to the six months of expected use. No other items are provided. Inmates must purchase extra underwear, sneakers, sweatshorts, sweatpants, sweatshirts, gloves, thermal underwear, shower shoes, extra towels, wash cloths, etc. from Commissary. If no money, do without. The prison provides a thin corduroy coat for winter and a knit cap. No rain gear is provided, plastic ponchos are sold on Commissary.

Due to remote location and steel bar enforced concrete walls, few cells can gather antenna signals for T.V. or radio. It costs \$17.00 a month to keep prison cable signal on. Televisions must be bought from prison at \$257.00 with tax (worth about \$100.00).

Tablets are now being sold at \$180.00, soon upgraded to \$224.00. They can be used to send or receive e-mails using Kiosk unit connection, or to purchase a song for \$1.91 each. All e-mails are preserved and kept by the government.

Each pod has 32 cells (A,B,C,D) with one guard assigned to it at a desk. He might respond if you yell out to him. Each cell has an Emergency Call button to summon the guard in the control booth for medical emergencies. We are permitted to make three completed phone calls per week, either collect or pre-paid by inmate. Calls are timed for 15 minutes and are recorded. The phone is attached to a rolling stanchion and placed outside cell door to use through your opened pie hole. We are in solitary confinement for 24 hours a day, except when leaving cell for specified reasons.