

Correctional Officer

Keep order inside a jail or prison. No tuition, paid training, and a job that asks a lot of you.

TYPICAL PAY

\$58,940

a year, full time

PAY RANGE

\$43k to \$93k

starting to experienced

TIME TO QUALIFY

up to 1 year

after high school

DEMAND

Limited

job outlook

LICENCE NEEDED

No

anyone can do it

WHERE YOU WORK

State prisons, county jails, federal institutions, juvenile centers

How you get there

- 1 High school diploma or GED (General Educational Development certificate)** Grade 12
 That is the education requirement in most systems. A clean record matters far more than your grades.
- 2 Apply and test** Weeks
 Written test, physical fitness test, interview. Minimum age is 18 to 21 depending on the agency. Federal jobs require United States citizenship and normally an appointment before age 37.
- 3 Background, medical and psychological screening** 1 to 6 months
 Criminal history, credit and employment checks, a drug screen and a psychological evaluation. Lying at any stage ends the application.
- 4 Academy** 1 to 4 months
 Usually 4 to 16 weeks depending on the state, covering law, defensive tactics, firearms, first aid and crisis intervention. Federal recruits add a few weeks of residential training in Glynco, Georgia.
- 5 Field training, then solo post** Weeks to a few months
 You shadow experienced officers, then take your own housing unit or tower.

Pros and cons

- + No tuition, no debt, paid from the first day
- + A pension and health insurance at an age when most of your friends have neither
- + Steady public sector work that is hard to outsource
- Real danger, and assaults on staff happen
- Mandatory overtime and short staffing are the normal state of the job
- The stress follows you home. Rates of burnout and post-traumatic stress in corrections are high

Optional boosts

Canine handler. Emergency response team. Transport officer. Case manager or counselor.

Good to know

Most officers inside are unarmed

In the great majority of prisons, officers working the housing units carry no firearm. Guns stay on the perimeter and in the towers, because a weapon inside a crowded unit can be taken. What you car...

One state alone employs tens of thousands

The Texas Department of Criminal Justice reports more than 34,000 staff supervising over 143,000 incarcerated people, plus hundreds of thousands more on probation and parole. Corrections is one of the la...

Where these numbers come from

My Next Move: Correctional Officers and Jailers
 American Correctional Association
 Federal Bureau of Prisons: jobs
 Texas Department of Criminal Justice

Numbers checked September 2026. Pay figures are typical full-time annual amounts in United States dollars, based on Bureau of Labor Statistics wage data and published pay scales. They vary by state, employer and experience. Tuition is for in-state students at public schools unless the card says otherwise. Sources, links and the click-through version: <https://career.help/us/careers/correctional-officer>



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