

# Massachusetts Department of Correction Objective Point Base Classification Report Fiscal Year 2023



Executive Office of Public Safety and Security  
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**Department of Correction  
Objective Point Base Classification Report to the  
Joint Committee on Public Safety and  
House and Senate Committees on Ways and Means  
Pursuant To DOC Budget Line Item FY23 8900-0001**

Pursuant to the Massachusetts Department of Correction (DOC) line item 8900-0001 of the Fiscal Year 2023 General Appropriations Act, this report overviews the Objective Point Base (“OPB”) Classification system for all incarcerated individuals in state prison facilities.

Overview:

The OPB is the standardized custody level assignment of an incarcerated individual based on objectively defined criteria. The criteria are weighed, scored and organized into a valid and reliable classification instrument accompanied by an operational manual for applying the instrument to incarcerated individuals in a systematic manner. OPB classification systems rely on factors that have been proven to predict prison adjustment and address issues of overclassification and underclassification.

History:

The development of the DOC’s OPB Classification system began in 2002 with the Department’s request for technical assistance from the National Institute of Corrections. The system was introduced in 2006 and became fully operational at all facilities in 2008.

According to the US Department of Justice (USDOJ), NIC Series, *A Guide for Correctional Agencies, Objective Prison Classification*, revalidation of a prison classification system shall occur every three (3) to five (5) years. In 2013, DOC commenced a revalidation of the OPB classification tool to ensure its validity. Based on that review, modifications to the OPB tool were implemented in 2014, increasing the number of incarcerated individuals eligible for placement in lower security without compromising the safety and security of staff, incarcerated individuals, and the public. Prior to the modification, national research data and DOC data were compared in a thorough analysis. The analysis indicated that DOC’s incarcerated individual profiles were consistent with national trends, and therefore the variables altered were consistent with national standards.

Given the USDOJ recommendation for revalidation, DOC initiated a second revalidation in 2018. The review was completed in May 2019 and all proposed modifications made during the revalidation process were approved in September 2019. Approved modifications to the tool were implemented on November 18, 2019, including adjusting several variables and restrictions while adding a fourth age category for male offenders. These modifications resulted in additional incarcerated individual eligibility for placement in a lower security.

Within the first quarter of 2023, a Revalidation Steering Committee will be formed. This Committee will include a cross section of staff from multiple operational areas to include classification, security, programs, research, policy development, and legal. The

Committee will be responsible for the assessment of the current system through a review of local and national research on correctional trends, and a review of Massachusetts' current variables and overrides. Any modification to the current system may result in drafting new policies and a revised classification instrument and manual if warranted.

Specifically, the following steps will be taken:

- Survey and study several classification systems throughout the United States
- Research any changes in national trends on correctional classification and incarceration rates
- Analyze and research variables identified as possible areas of concern by outside stakeholders
- Hold interviews with staff and incarcerated individuals from all levels of security at both male and female facilities
- Conduct a reliability assessment by having a group of selected Correction Program Officers from the field score identical cases to ensure a reliability rating of at least 90%
- Assess each existing variable and override based on research, trends and interviews
- DOC's Research and Planning Division will provide reports for analysis to assess the current's tool validity and to identify where potential changes may be needed to improve the validity of the tool
- The Committee will review all results of interviews and research and make recommendations regarding potential updates or changes
- Development of any cost-effective solutions

Override Rates:

A necessary feature of an OPB Classification System is the use of overrides which allow staff to depart from the scored custody level when appropriate. An override is applied when a scored custody level is changed based on the professional judgment of trained classification staff. As stated in 103 CMR 420, a restriction prevents an incarcerated individual from placement in lower custody, regardless of their OPB score. Therefore, classification staff have no authority to disregard a restriction during the consideration of an override. The use of discretionary overrides should be between 5% and 15% of the classified population.

Override Rates for DOC incarcerated individuals as of December 30, 2022 are:

Override to Higher Security	7%
Override to Lower Security	4%
Total	11%

Custody Level Distribution:

Custody Level Breakdown for MA DOC  
incarcerated individuals as of December 30, 2022

Maximum Security	13%
Medium Security	77%
Minimum Security or Below	10%

As of December 30, 2022, no incarcerated individuals remain on an institutional transfer waitlist due to bed space. Twelve (12) incarcerated individuals are awaiting CORI Petitioner notification clearance for transfer to lower security. Thirteen (13) incarcerated individuals are pending transfer awaiting resolution of a possible change in status.