

Understanding the Difference between Jails and Prisons

Jail is the initial place where a person goes when he/she is arrested. Many people in jail have not yet been convicted of a crime and are held pending a plea agreement, trial, or sentencing. Thus, jails house innocent people as well as people who have committed misdemeanors and felonies. Jails are usually operated and funded by local towns, cities, or counties. Once sentenced, the determination of whether the incarcerated individual transfers from jail to prison is based on the length of the sentence. Most states have a one-year sentence threshold in jail, but some states keep people in jail with longer sentences.

Prisons, on the other hand, are part of either a state or federal system. Prisons only house convicted felons who have received a sentence of one year or more. Some states have unified correctional systems run by the state that combine jails and prisons together.