

# RULES OF PRACTICE AND PROCEDURE

## *United States Sentencing Commission*

*(As amended August 2007)*

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### **PART I – PURPOSE OF RULES; RULES AMENDMENT PROCEDURE**

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#### **Rule 1.1 – Application and Purpose**

Pursuant to 28 U.S.C. § 995(a)(1) and other applicable provisions of its organizational statute, the United States Sentencing Commission (“the Commission”) has established these rules governing its usual operating practices. The Commission, an agency within the judicial branch of government, is subject to only that provision of the Administrative Procedures Act, section 553 of title 5, United States Code, relating to publication in the *Federal Register* and a public hearing procedure, with regard to proposed sentencing guidelines or amendments thereto. *See* 28 U.S.C. § 994(x). The Commission is not subject to a variety of other statutes, such as the Federal Advisory Committee Act, the Sunshine Act, and the Freedom of Information Act, typically applicable to rulemaking agencies in the executive branch. The Commission nevertheless desires to involve interested members of the public in its work to the maximum extent practicable. Accordingly, these rules are issued for the purpose of more fully informing interested persons of opportunities and procedures for becoming aware of and participating in the public business of the Commission. These rules are not intended to create or enlarge legal rights for any person.

#### **Rule 1.2 – Rules Amendment Procedure**

(a) Except as provided in subsection (b), amendment of these rules shall require the affirmative vote in a public meeting of a majority (and not less than three) of the voting members then serving. Any such amendment shall be adopted only after notice and reasonable opportunity for public comment.

(b) The Commission temporarily may suspend any rule contained herein and/or adopt a supplemental or superseding rule by affirmative vote in a public meeting of a majority of the voting members then serving.

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### **PART II – ACTION BY THE COMMISSION**

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#### **Rule 2.1 – Members**

For purposes of the voting procedures set forth in these Rules, “member” of the Commission shall mean a voting member and shall not include an *ex-officio*, non-voting member. *Ex-officio* members may not vote or make or second motions.

#### **Rule 2.2 – Voting Rules for Action by the Commission**

Except as otherwise provided in these rules or by law, action by the Commission requires the affirmative vote of a majority of the members at a public meeting at which a quorum is present. A quorum shall consist of a majority of the members then serving. Members shall be deemed “present” and may participate and vote in meetings from remote locations by electronic means, including telephone, satellite, and video conference devices.

Promulgation of guidelines, policy statements, official commentary, and amendments thereto shall require the affirmative vote of at least four members at a public meeting. *See* 28 U.S.C. § 994(a).

Publication for comment of proposed amendments to guidelines, policy statements, or official commentary shall require the affirmative vote of at least three members at a public meeting. The decision to instruct staff to prepare a retroactivity impact analysis for a proposed amendment shall require the affirmative vote of at least three members at a public meeting.

Action on miscellaneous matters may be taken without a meeting based on the affirmative vote, by written or oral communication, of a majority of the members then serving. Such matters include the approval of budget requests, legal briefs, staff reports, analyses of legislation, administrative and personnel issues, notices regarding Commission amendment priorities, technical and clerical amendments to these rules, and decisions to hold a nonpublic meeting.

A motion to reconsider Commission action may be made only by a commissioner on the prevailing side of the vote for which reconsideration is sought, or who did not vote on the matter. Four votes are

necessary to reconsider a Commission vote on any question on which a four-vote majority is required.

### **PART III – MEETINGS AND HEARINGS**

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#### **Rule 3.1 – Meetings**

The Chair shall call and preside at Commission meetings. In the absence of the Chair, the Chair will designate a Vice Chair to preside.

Members may participate in meetings from remote locations by electronic means, including telephone, satellite, and video conference devices.

#### **Rule 3.2 – Public Meetings**

The Commission shall meet on at least two occasions in each calendar quarter to conduct business. Except as provided in Rule 3.3, meetings of the Commission with outside parties shall be conducted in public.

To the extent practicable, the Chair shall issue, through the Office of Staff Director, a public notice of any public meeting at least seven days prior to the date of the meeting. The public notice, to the extent practicable, shall indicate the general purpose(s) of the meeting and include an agenda and any related documents approved for public release.

At the discretion of the Chair, members of the public may be afforded an opportunity to comment on any issue on the agenda of a public meeting.

#### **Rule 3.3 – Nonpublic Meetings**

The Commission may hold nonpublic meetings (i.e., meetings closed to the public) for purposes of the following: (1) to transact business of the Commission that is not appropriate for a public meeting (e.g., discussion and resolution of personnel and budget issues); (2) to receive information from, and participate in discussions with, Commission staff and any person designated by an *ex-officio* commissioner as support staff for that commissioner; and (3) upon a decision by a majority of the members then serving, to receive or share information, from or with any other person, that is inappropriate for public disclosure (one example of which would be information from a law enforcement agency, the public disclosure of which would reveal confidential investigatory techniques or jeopardize an ongoing investigation).

#### **Rule 3.4 – Public Hearings**

The Commission may convene a public hearing on any matter involving the promulgation of sentencing guidelines or any other matter affecting the Commission's business. A request for comment on a proposed matter does not necessarily mean that a public hearing will be held on the matter or that a public hearing, if scheduled, will pertain to all issues raised in the request for comment.

Notice of a public hearing shall be given as soon as practicable. The notice shall include, as applicable, information regarding a procedure for requesting an opportunity to testify, and the availability of documents or reports relevant to the subject of the hearing.

The Commission may specify the format for public hearings, invite witnesses, choose witnesses from among those who request the opportunity to testify, and require that written testimony be submitted in advance of the hearing.

The Commission may exclude from such a hearing any electronic devices that record the voice or image of any or all witnesses, as well as cameras of any kind.

At the request of any witness to turn off any such electronic device(s) during that person's testimony, the Chair of the Commission may order, at his or her discretion, that use of such devices be discontinued during the testimony of that witness.

#### **Rule 3.5 – Written Record of Meetings and Hearings**

The Commission shall prepare and maintain written minutes of public meetings and make them publicly available after their approval by the Commission. The Commission shall tape record public meetings and make the recordings publicly available after the approval of the minutes of such meeting. No such recording shall be copied or removed from the Commission's offices.

The Commission shall maintain a written transcription of public hearings that shall be publicly available for inspection.

### **PART IV – GUIDELINE AMENDMENT PROCESS**

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#### **Rule 4.1 – Promulgation of Amendments**

The Commission may promulgate and submit to Congress amendments to the guidelines after the

beginning of a regular session of Congress and not later than May 1 of that year. Amendments shall be accompanied by an explanation or statement of reasons for the amendments. Unless otherwise specified, or unless Congress legislates to the contrary, amendments submitted for review shall take effect on the first day of November of the year in which submitted. 28 U.S.C. § 994(p).

At other times, pursuant to special statutory enactment, the Commission may promulgate amendments to accomplish identified congressional objectives.

Amendments to policy statements and commentary may be promulgated and put into effect at any time. However, to the extent practicable, the Commission shall endeavor to include amendments to policy statements and commentary in any submission of guideline amendments to Congress and put them into effect on the same November 1 date as any guideline amendments issued in the same year.

Generally, promulgated amendments will be given prospective application only. However, in those cases in which the Commission considers an amendment for retroactive application to previously sentenced, imprisoned defendants, it shall decide whether to make the amendment retroactive at the same meeting at which it decides to promulgate the amendment. Prior to final Commission action on the retroactive application of an amendment, the Commission shall review the retroactivity impact analysis prepared pursuant to Rule 2.2, *supra*.

#### **Rule 4.2 – Prison Impact of Amendments**

Prior to promulgating amendments to the guidelines, the Commission shall consider the impact of any amendment on available penal and correctional resources, and on other facilities and services and shall make such information available to the public.

#### **Rule 4.3 – Notice and Comment on Proposed Amendments**

In proposing and promulgating guidelines and amendments thereto, the Commission shall comply with the requirements of section 553 of title 5, United States Code, relating to publication in the *Federal Register* and public hearing procedure. 28 U.S.C. § 994(x).

The Commission may promulgate commentary and policy statements, and amendments thereto, without regard to the provisions of 28 U.S.C. § 994(x). Nevertheless, the Commission will endeavor to provide, to the extent practicable, comparable opportunities for public input on proposed policy

statements and commentary considered in conjunction with guideline amendments.

#### **Rule 4.4 – Federal Register Notice of Proposed Amendments**

A vote to publish a proposed amendment to a guideline, policy statement, or official commentary in the *Federal Register* shall be deemed to be a request for public comment on the proposed amendment. At the same time the Commission votes to publish proposed amendments for comment, it shall request public comment on whether to make any amendments retroactive.

The notice of proposed amendments also shall provide, to the extent appropriate and practicable, reasons for consideration of amendments and a summary of or reference to publicly available information that is relevant to the issue(s). In addition, the publication notice shall include a deadline for public comment and may include a notice of any scheduled public hearing(s) or meetings on the issue(s).

In the case of proposed amendments to guidelines or issues for comment that form the basis for possible guidelines amendments, the Commission shall allow, to the extent practicable, a minimum period of public comment of at least 60 calendar days prior to final Commission action on the proposed amendments.

#### **Rule 4.5 – Public Hearing on Proposed Amendments**

In the case of “emergency” amendments issued pursuant to special statutory authorization, the Commission ordinarily will not conduct a public hearing on the proposed amendments but will afford such opportunity for written comment as time allows.

In the case of other amendments to guidelines or policy statements issued pursuant to 28 U.S.C. § 994, the Commission shall conduct a public hearing on the proposed amendments, unless the Commission determines that time does not permit a hearing or that a hearing will not substantially assist the amendment process. Notice of the hearing shall be given in the *Federal Register* and by other means designed to inform persons likely to be interested in participating in such a hearing.

### **PART V – PUBLIC PARTICIPATION IN GUIDELINE AMENDMENT PROCESS**

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#### **Rule 5.1 – Public Comment File**

The Office of Publishing and Public Affairs shall receive and maintain public comment and public hearing testimony received by the Commission.

“Public comment” means (1) any written comment submitted by an outside party, including an agency represented by an *ex-officio* commissioner, pursuant to a solicitation by the Commission; and (2) any other written submission, from an outside party, that the Chair or a majority of the members then serving has not precluded from being made available to the public. “Public comment” does not include any internal communication between and among commissioners, Commission staff, and any person designated by an *ex-officio* commissioner as support staff for that commissioner.

#### **Rule 5.2 – Notice of Priorities**

The Commission shall publish annually in the *Federal Register*, and make available to the public, a notice of the tentative priorities for future Commission inquiry and possible action, including areas for possible amendments to guidelines, policy statements, and commentary. Any such notice shall include an invitation to, and deadline for, the submission of written public comment on the proposed priorities.

Subsequent to the deadline for comment on the tentative priorities, the Commission shall publish in

the *Federal Register*, and make available to the public for inspection, a notice of priorities for Commission inquiry and possible action.

#### **Rule 5.3 – Information Relevant to the Amendment Process**

To fulfill Commission priorities and inform consideration of potential amendments, the Staff Director shall direct the preparation of relevant data, reports, and other information for consideration by the Commission. Upon authorization by the Staff Director, the Office of Publishing and Public Affairs shall make the data, reports, and other information available to the public as soon as practicable.

#### **Rule 5.4 – Advisory Groups**

Upon authorization of the Commission, the Staff Director may facilitate the creation, membership, and periodic meeting at the Commission offices and elsewhere, of advisory groups of defense attorneys, academics, probation officers, judges, prosecutors, and others, to facilitate formal and informal input to the Commission.

Two types of advisory groups are authorized: standing and ad hoc. The following groups are standing advisory groups: the Practitioners Advisory Group, the Probation Officers Advisory Group, and the Victims Advisory Group.

Upon creating an advisory group, the Commission may prescribe such policies regarding the conduct of meetings and operation of the group as the Commission deems necessary or appropriate. The Commission also may delegate to an advisory group the responsibility for developing such policies.

In addition, the Commission expects to solicit input, from time to time, from outside groups representing the federal judiciary, prosecutors, defense attorneys, crime victims, and other interested groups.

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## **PART VI – INFORMATION ABOUT THE COMMISSION**

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### **Rule 6.1 – Office(s)**

The offices of the Commission are located in the Thurgood Marshall Federal Judiciary Building, Suite 2-500, South Lobby, One Columbus Circle, N.E., Washington, D.C. 20002-8002.

The office can be reached by telephone between 8:30 a.m. and 5:30 p.m., Monday through Friday. The main telephone number is (202) 502-4500. The fax number is (202) 502-4699. The e-mail address is [pubaffairs@ussc.gov](mailto:pubaffairs@ussc.gov).

### **Rule 6.2 – Availability of Materials for Public Inspection; Office of Publishing and Public Affairs**

The Office of Publishing and Public Affairs is the repository of all materials that are available to the public.

Generally, the Office of Publishing and Public Affairs will maintain for public inspection the following: (1) agendas and schedules for Commission public meetings and public hearings; (2) approved minutes of Commission public meetings; (3) transcripts of public hearings; (4) public comment as defined in Rule 5.1; (5) data, reports, and other information made available pursuant to Rule 5.3; and (6) with respect to nonpublic meetings described in Rule 3.3(3), a list of outside parties attending the meeting, a list of issues upon which the Commission was briefed, and, unless otherwise directed by the Chair or a majority of the members then serving, copies of written materials submitted by outside parties.

The Office of Publishing and Public Affairs also will make available upon request: (1) information available pursuant to the Commission's policy on public access to Commission data; and (2) *A Guide to Publications & Resources* that lists all publications and datasets available from the Commission.

### **Rule 6.3 – Internet Site**

The Commission maintains and updates information and documents on an Internet web site. The web site is found at <http://www.ussc.gov>. This resource includes general information, such as background information about the Commission and Commissioners, notices for scheduled meetings and hearings, minutes of recent meetings, transcripts of

public hearings, listings of Commission priorities and projects, outstanding public comment solicitations, recently promulgated amendments, the text of numerous reports and resources available from the Commission, and the text of the *Guidelines Manual* and Commission reports.

### **Rule 6.4 – Information at Federal Depository Libraries**

Commission publications printed by the Government Printing Office, and other selected documents, are available in hard copy or microfiche form through the Government Printing Office's Depository Library system. The location of the nearest Federal Depository Library can be determined in several ways: (1) by requesting a free copy of the *Directory of Depository Libraries* from the U.S. Government Printing Office, Library Programs Services, Stop: SLLD, Washington, DC 20401; (2) by asking at any local library for the address of the nearest Federal Depository Library; or (3) by using the Internet at [http://www.access.gpo.gov/su\\_docs/locators/findlibs/index.html](http://www.access.gpo.gov/su_docs/locators/findlibs/index.html).

### **Rule 6.5 – Access to Commission Data – Research Consortium**

The Commission provides its various databases, excluding individual identifiers, to the University of Michigan's Inter-University Consortium for Political and Social Research (ICPSR). Researchers interested in studying federal sentencing practices through quantitative methods can access Commission sentencing data through this means. Contact ICPSR, P.O. Box 1248, Ann Arbor, MI 48106; or call 1-800-999-0960; or use the following Internet address: <http://www.ICPSR.umich.edu/NACJD/archive.html>.

*Editorial Note: These rules were originally adopted by the Commission on July 11, 1997, and revised August 29, 2007.*