

First and Second-Degree Murder in Pennsylvania

Fact Sheet



If a person is convicted of first or second-degree murder in Pennsylvania, they will face life imprisonment without the possibility of parole



For first and second-degree murder in PA, there is no distinction between the sentencing of an accomplice and the primary actor of a crime.



In the case of juvenile lifers in PA, there are accomplices that are still incarcerated and the primary actor has been released because of PA's sentencing laws.

SB135

Parole eligibility would be created for lifers who have served 35 years for a 1st-degree murder charge and in cases of lifers who have served at least 25 years for a 2nd-degree murder charge.

47%

More than 47% of people serving 2nd-degree murder charges in PA are over 50 now.¹



3,695

of people serving first-degree murder

1,090

of people serving second-degree murder

In Pennsylvania, the population of people serving life without parole for second-degree murder today is old, and their incarceration is expensive. As of September 1, 2020, almost half (47.1%) of the people serving life for second-degree murder were age 50 and older. That is already double the percentage of those age 50 and older in the total DOC population.¹

The Bureau of Justice Statistics recently released two studies on 400,000 people released in 30 states in 2005. It found that while re-arrest rates are high for all people released from prison, people convicted of violent offenses are less likely to be re-arrested within 3 years.²

Lindsay, A. (2021, January). Second-Degree Murder in Pennsylvania: An Objective Assessment of Sentencing. PLSE-Second-Degree-Murder-Audit. <https://www.plsephilly.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/01/PLSE-Second-Degree-Murder-Audit-Jan-19-2021.pdf>.

Alper, M., Durose, M. R., Markman, J. (2018, May). 2018 Update on Prisoner Recidivism: A 9-year Follow-up. Bureau of Justice Statistics. <https://bjs.ojp.gov/content/pub/pdf/18upr9yfup0514.pdf>.