



# QuickFacts

## Career Offenders

### What is a Career Offender?

A "career offender" is someone who commits a crime of violence or a controlled substance offense after two prior felony convictions for those crimes. The sentencing guidelines assign all "career offenders" to Criminal History Category (CHC) VI and to offense levels at or near the statutory maximum penalty of the offense of conviction.<sup>1</sup>

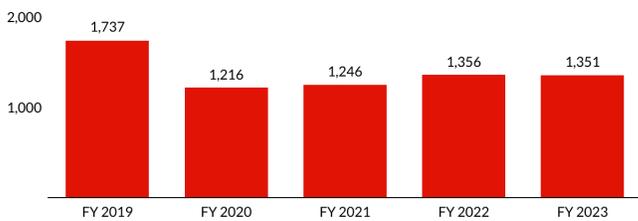
### Population Snapshot

64,124 cases were reported in FY23;

1,351 involved career offenders.<sup>2</sup>

In 91.8% of such cases, the career offender status increased the guideline range.

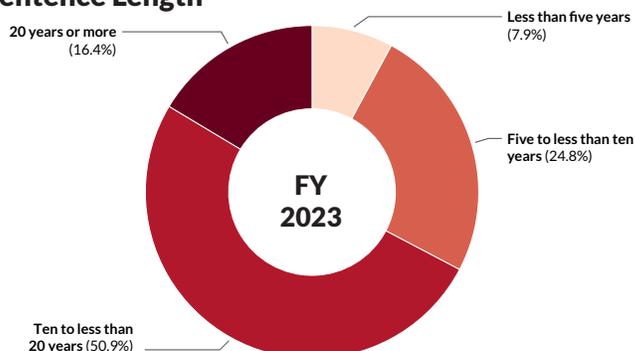
### Numbers Over Time



### Most Common Guidelines

Crime Type	Number of Individuals
Drug Trafficking	1,056
Firearms	157
Robbery	75
Other	62

### Sentence Length



### Individual and Offense Characteristics

- 95.9% of career offenders were men.
- 58.4% were Black, 25.7% were White, 14.1% were Hispanic, and 1.9% were Other races.
- Their average age was 40 years.
- 98.4% were United States citizens.
- 45.7% would not change from Criminal History Category (CHC) VI if the career offender provision had not been applied;
  - 0.0% were CHC I;
  - 0.4% were CHC II;
  - 8.6% were CHC III;
  - 21.6% were CHC IV;
  - 23.7% were CHC V.
- The top five districts for career offenders were:
  - District of New Jersey (49);
  - Eastern District of Arkansas (48);
  - Western District of Pennsylvania (44);
  - Southern District of Iowa (40);
  - Eastern District of North Carolina (39).

### Punishment

- The average sentence for career offenders was 154 months.
- 99.4% were sentenced to prison.
- 63.5% were convicted of an offense carrying a mandatory minimum penalty.

### Impact of Career Offender Status<sup>3</sup>

- 40.1% of career offenders had an increase in both Final Offense Level (FOL) and CHC.
  - Their average FOL increased from 25 to 31 and their average CHC increased from IV to VI.
- 37.2% had an increase the FOL only.
  - Their average FOL increased from 24 to 31.
- 14.5% had an increase in the CHC only.
  - Their average CHC increased from IV to VI.
- 8.2% of career offenders had no increase in FOL or CHC.



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### Sentences Relative to the Guideline Range

Of the 42.7% of career offenders who were sentenced under the *Guidelines Manual*:

- 47.4% were sentenced within the guideline range.
- 40.3% received a substantial assistance departure.
  - Their average sentence reduction was 51.0%.
- 10.6% received some other downward departure.
  - Their average sentence reduction was 45.8%.
- 1.7% received an Early Disposition Program departure.<sup>4</sup>
  - Their average sentence reduction was 64.9%.

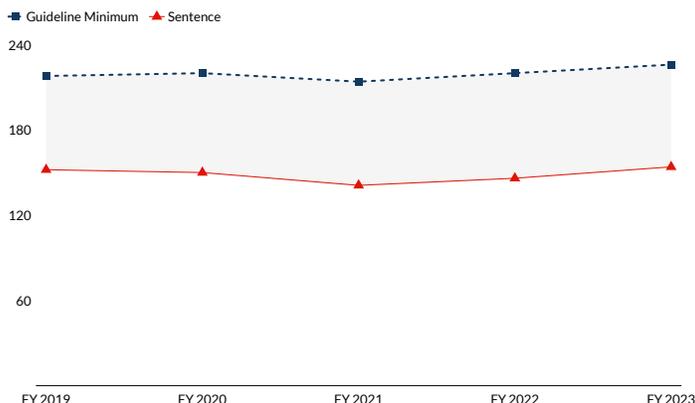
57.3% received a variance; of those individuals:

- 98.8% received a downward variance.
  - Their average sentence reduction was 39.6%.
- 1.2% received an upward variance.
  - Their average sentence increase was 29.7%.

The average guideline minimum increased and the average sentence imposed fluctuated over the past five years.

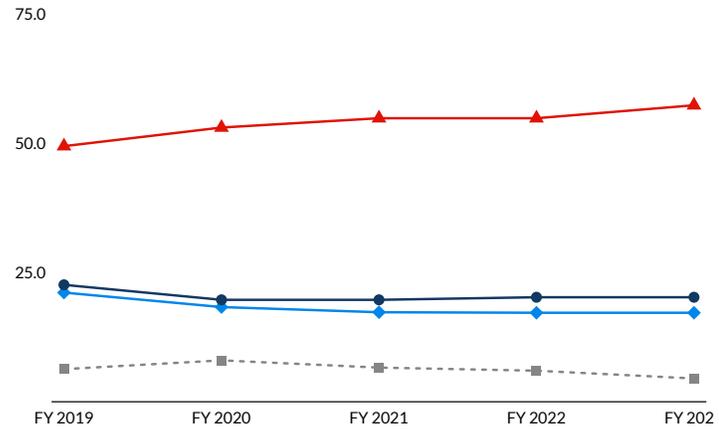
- The average guideline minimum slightly increased from 218 months in fiscal year 2019 to 226 months in fiscal year 2023.
- The average sentence was 152 months in fiscal year 2019 and 154 months in fiscal year 2023.

### Average Guideline Minimum and Average Sentence (in months)

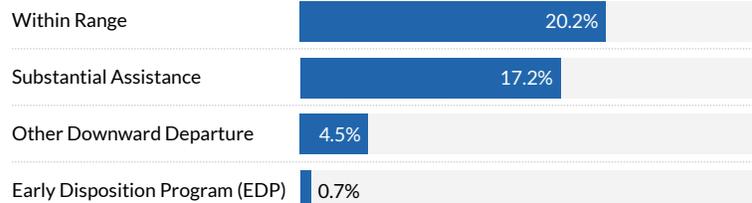
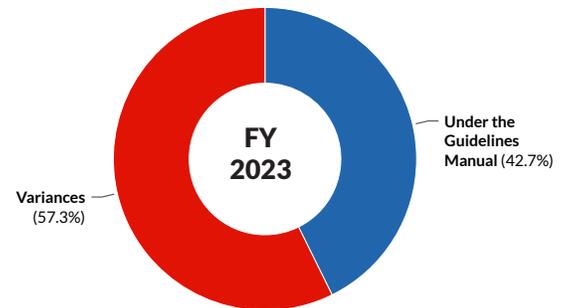


### Sentences Relative to the Guideline Range

◆ Within Range ◆ Substantial Assistance ■ Other Downward Departure ▲ Variances



### Sentences Relative to the Guideline Range



<sup>1</sup> In some cases, a state offense classified under state law as a misdemeanor (e.g., in Iowa, Massachusetts, and Michigan) is considered a felony in determining “career offender” status. For more information, see USSG §4B1.1.

<sup>2</sup> Cases with incomplete sentencing information were excluded from the analysis.

<sup>3</sup> Cases missing Ch. 2 guideline data and cases in which §4B1.1(c) applied were excluded for this part of the analysis. Cases where both §4B1.1 and §4B1.4 (Armed Career Criminal) applied were assigned to the provision with the higher offense level.

<sup>4</sup> “Early Disposition Program” (or EDP) departures are departures where the government sought a sentence below the guideline range because the defendant participated in the government’s Early Disposition Program, through which cases are resolved in an expedited manner. See USSG §5K3.1.