

# Primer



## Criminal History



Prepared by the  
Office of the General Counsel

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## **I. INTRODUCTION AND OVERVIEW**

This primer provides a general overview of the sentencing guidelines and statutes relevant to application of Chapter Four of the *Guidelines Manual* (Criminal History and Criminal Livelihood). Although the primer identifies some of the key cases and concepts, it is not a comprehensive compilation of authority nor intended to be a substitute for independent research and analysis of primary sources.

The following are some of the main considerations that affect criminal history computations under Chapter Four:

***The Grid.***—The guideline sentencing table is comprised of two components: Offense Level and Criminal History Category.<sup>1</sup> Criminal history forms the horizontal axis and is divided into six categories, from I (lowest) to VI (highest). Chapter Four, Part A provides instruction on how to calculate a defendant’s criminal history category by assigning points for certain prior convictions.<sup>2</sup> A defendant’s criminal history category, combined with the total offense level, determines the advisory guideline range.

***Timing.***—Statutory and guideline provisions contain different timing requirements for which prior offenses should be counted. For example, §4A1.1 (Criminal History Category), §4B1.1 (Career Offender), and the immigration and firearms guidelines impose remoteness constraints on the use of prior convictions, but §4B1.4 (Armed Career Criminal), §4B1.5 (Repeat and Dangerous Sex Offender Against Minors), and their corresponding statutes do not.<sup>3</sup>

***Repeat Offending.***—For certain offenses, statutory enhancements for repeat offenders that require mandatory minimum sentences may result in the application of different criminal history guidelines. In addition, certain prior convictions, generally relating to crimes of violence and drug and sex offenses, may increase the defendant’s guideline offense level for the instant offense. Such prior convictions require scrutiny to determine whether they fit the specific definitions that triggers the enhanced penalty provisions.

***Departures.***—Departures from the calculated guideline range for overrepresentation or underrepresentation of a defendant’s criminal history are authorized.<sup>4</sup> An upward departure from the guideline range may be warranted when a defendant’s criminal history does not adequately reflect the seriousness of past criminal

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<sup>1</sup> U.S. SENT’G COMM’N, *Guidelines Manual*, Ch.5, Pt.A (Sentencing Table) (Nov. 2018) [hereinafter USSG].

<sup>2</sup> USSG Ch.4, Pt.A (Criminal History).

<sup>3</sup> See 8 U.S.C. § 1326(b); 18 U.S.C. § 924(e); 21 U.S.C. § 841(b).

<sup>4</sup> See USSG §4A1.3.

conduct or the likelihood that the defendant will commit other crimes. Similarly, a downward departure may be authorized if a defendant's criminal history overstates the seriousness of his or her criminal record or the likelihood that the defendant will commit other crimes.

## **II. CRIMINAL HISTORY**

Part A of Chapter Four provides instruction on how to calculate a defendant's criminal history for most cases.

### **A. COMPUTATION (§4A1.1)**

The calculation of a defendant's criminal history category starts with computing how many points each prior conviction carries. Section 4A1.1 (Criminal History Category) provides as follows:

- (a) Add 3 points for each prior sentence of imprisonment exceeding one year and one month.
- (b) Add 2 points for each prior sentence of imprisonment of at least sixty days not counted in (a).
- (c) Add 1 point for each prior sentence not counted in (a) or (b), up to a total of 4 points for this subsection.
- (d) Add 2 points if the defendant committed the instant offense while under any criminal justice sentence, including probation, parole, supervised release, imprisonment, work release, or escape status.
- (e) Add 1 point for each prior sentence resulting from a conviction of a crime of violence that did not receive any points under (a), (b), or (c) above because such sentence was treated as a single sentence, up to a total of 3 points for this subsection.<sup>5</sup>

There is no limit to the number of points that can be assigned for prior sentences under subsections (a) and (b).<sup>6</sup> Under subsection (e), convictions for crimes of violence can override the 4-point limit on subsection (c) prior sentences by up to three additional criminal history points.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> USSG §4A1.1.

<sup>6</sup> USSG §4A1.1, comment. (n.1); USSG §4A1.1, comment. (n.2).

<sup>7</sup> USSG §4A1.1, comment. (n.5).

## **B. DEFINITIONS AND INSTRUCTIONS (§4A1.2)**

Section 4A1.2 (Definitions and Instructions for Computing Criminal History) contains key definitions and specific instructions for computing criminal history.

### **1. “Prior Sentence”**

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Under §4A1.2(a), a “prior sentence” is “any sentence previously imposed upon adjudication of guilt, whether by guilty plea, trial, or plea of *nolo contendere*, for conduct not part of the instant offense.”<sup>8</sup> The term “prior sentence” “is not directed at the chronology of the conduct, but the chronology of the sentencing.”<sup>9</sup> Thus, a previously imposed sentence counts even if it was for conduct that occurred after the offense of conviction.<sup>10</sup> Courts are divided over whether to consider a sentence imposed after the original sentencing but before resentencing in the same matter.<sup>11</sup>

#### **a. Relevant conduct**

A prior sentence cannot be counted in calculating criminal history if it encompassed conduct that would be considered relevant conduct to the offense of conviction under §1B1.3 (Relevant Conduct (Factors that Determine the Guideline Range)).<sup>12</sup>

#### **b. Multiple prior sentences**

Multiple prior sentences either are counted separately or are treated as a single sentence, depending on the circumstances. Prior sentences always are counted separately if the offenses were separated by an intervening arrest (*i.e.*, the defendant is arrested for

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<sup>8</sup> USSG §4A1.2(a)(1); *see also* United States v. Baptiste, 876 F.3d 1057, 1062 (11th Cir. 2017) (where adjudication is withheld, it does not qualify as a “prior sentence” under §4A1.2).

<sup>9</sup> United States v. Lopez, 349 F.3d 39, 40 (2d Cir. 2003) (per curiam) (citing United States v. Espinal, 981 F.2d 664, 668 (2d Cir. 1992)).

<sup>10</sup> *See, e.g.*, United States v. McSmith, 968 F.3d 731, 737 (8th Cir. 2020) (sentence imposed seven months before sentence in case and also occurring after the relevant conduct in case was a prior sentence justifying one criminal history point); *Lopez*, 349 F.3d at 41 (same).

<sup>11</sup> *Compare* United States v. Burke, 863 F.3d 1355, 1360 (11th Cir. 2017) (can consider); United States v. Klump, 57 F.3d 801, 803 (9th Cir. 1995) (can consider); *and* United States v. Bleike, 950 F.2d 214, 221 (5th Cir. 1991) (not plain error to consider), *with* United States v. Ticchiarelli, 171 F.3d 24, 34–37 (1st Cir. 1999) (improper to consider intervening sentence under law of case doctrine).

<sup>12</sup> *Compare* United States v. Henry, 288 F.3d 657 (5th Cir. 2002) (firearms and trespass); United States v. Salter, 241 F.3d 392 (5th Cir. 2001) (tax evasion related to money laundering and drug offenses); *and* United States v. Thomas, 54 F.3d 73 (2d Cir. 1995) (state larceny related to federal forgery), *with* United States v. Fries, 796 F.3d 1112 (9th Cir. 2015) (use of a chemical weapon and making false statements not related to possession of unregistered destructive devices); United States v. Yerena-Magana, 478 F.3d 683 (5th Cir. 2007) (illegal reentry not part of drug offense).

the first offense prior to committing the second offense).<sup>13</sup> Section 4A1.2(a)(2) states that “[i]f there is no intervening arrest, prior sentences are counted separately unless (A) the sentences resulted from offenses contained in the same charging instrument; or (B) the sentences were imposed on the same day.”<sup>14</sup>

Sentences resulting from offenses contained in the same charging instrument or imposed on the same day are treated as a single sentence. If prior sentences are treated as a single sentence, use the longest sentence if concurrent sentences were imposed, and the aggregate sentence if consecutive sentences were imposed.<sup>15</sup>

### **c. Revocation sentences**

Sentences for prior revocations of probation, parole, or supervised release also are counted. The term of imprisonment imposed upon revocation, if any, is added to the original sentence to compute the total criminal history points for that offense as a whole.<sup>16</sup>

## **2. “Sentence of Imprisonment”**

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This term refers to the maximum sentence of incarceration imposed; that is, the sentence pronounced by the court, not the length of time actually served.<sup>17</sup> Application Note 2 to §4A1.2 instructs that “[t]o qualify as a sentence of imprisonment, the defendant

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<sup>13</sup> USSG §4A1.2(a)(2); *see also* United States v. Fuehrer, 844 F.3d 767, 773–74 (8th Cir. 2016) (no intervening arrest where defendant was arrested for first offense after commission of second); United States v. Leal-Felix, 665 F.3d 1037, 1039 (9th Cir. 2011) (no intervening arrest for two “citations” for driving while license suspended because not considered formal arrests for criminal history purposes). *But see* United States v. Crippen, 627 F.3d 1056, 1066 (8th Cir. 2010) (felonies separated by intervening arrests were not single criminal episode counted separately); United States v. Smith, 549 F.3d 355, 361–62 (6th Cir. 2008) (no intervening arrest between first two prior offenses, but intervening arrest between second and third offense committed while on bond).

<sup>14</sup> USSG §4A1.2(a)(2).

<sup>15</sup> *Id.*; *see also* United States v. Garcia-Sanchez, 916 F.3d 522, 525–26 (5th Cir. 2019) (district court correctly applied §4A1.2’s single sentence rule to §2L1.2 enhancement); United States v. Marroquin, 884 F.3d 298, 300 (5th Cir. 2018) (error to count individual convictions separately where multiple convictions were consolidated and single sentence was imposed); United States v. Davis, 720 F.3d 215, 219 (4th Cir. 2013) (“consolidated sentence” for multiple offenses considered “one sentence” regardless of intervening arrest).

<sup>16</sup> USSG §4A1.2(k)(1); *see, e.g.*, United States v. Guidry, 960 F.3d 676, 684 (5th Cir. 2020) (affirming three points for a sentence of imprisonment exceeding one year and one month where defendant served one year in jail and an additional 180 days for a probation violation). Even when the conduct constituting the basis for the revocation is the same conduct at issue in the instant federal case, the rule requiring the revocation sentence to be added to the original sentence remains in effect. *See* United States v. Rivera-Berrios, 902 F.3d 20, 26 (1st Cir. 2018) (rejecting argument that this approach constituted impermissible double counting).

<sup>17</sup> USSG §4A1.2(b)(1).

must have actually served a period of imprisonment on such sentence.”<sup>18</sup> In the case of an indeterminate sentence, the high end of the prescribed sentencing range is treated as the maximum sentence.<sup>19</sup> If the court reduces the prison sentence, however, the reduced sentence controls.<sup>20</sup>

**a. Suspended sentence**

If part of the sentence is suspended, the “sentence of imprisonment” includes only the portion that was not suspended.<sup>21</sup> If a defendant receives “time served,” the actual time spent in custody will be counted.<sup>22</sup> A discharged sentence does not qualify as a suspended sentence under §4A1.2(b)(2) if the “suspension” was not ordered by a court.<sup>23</sup>

**b. Imprisonment**

In determining whether a defendant has served a sentence of imprisonment, the court looks to the nature of the facility, rather than its purpose.<sup>24</sup> In *United States v. Brooks*,

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<sup>18</sup> USSG §4A1.2, comment. (n.2); *see also* *United States v. Valente*, 915 F.3d 916, 922 (2d Cir. 2019) (defendant’s prior 60-day term of imprisonment should have been assigned one criminal history point, rather than two, because “he had not yet served it because of medical issues.”).

<sup>19</sup> USSG §4A1.2, comment. (n.2); *see also* *United States v. Levenite*, 277 F.3d 454, 468 (4th Cir. 2002) (indeterminate sentence of two days to 23 months scored as sentence “exceeding one year and one month” under §4A1.1(a), even though defendant actually served only two days).

<sup>20</sup> *United States v. Kristl*, 437 F.3d 1050, 1057 (10th Cir. 2006) (per curiam) (reduced sentence was appropriate for criminal history purposes where state rule permitted reconsideration of sentence based on the law and facts, and government failed to meet its burden of establishing that reconsideration of sentence was for good behavior).

<sup>21</sup> USSG §4A1.2(b)(2); *see, e.g.*, *United States v. Gonzales*, 506 F.3d 940, 946 (9th Cir. 2007) (30-day sentence was entirely suspended and should have been excluded); *United States v. Tabaka*, 982 F.2d 100, 102–03 (3d Cir. 1992) (all but two days suspended).

<sup>22</sup> *See* *United States v. Fernandez*, 743 F.3d 453, 457 (5th Cir. 2014) (“because a time-served ‘credit’ noted in a prior sentencing order cannot be suspended, the period credited serves as the measure for assessing criminal history points in accordance with §4A1.2(b)(2) of the Sentencing Guidelines when the prior sentence is otherwise suspended”); *United States v. Dixon*, 230 F.3d 109, 112 (4th Cir. 2000) (where sentences were suspended, “sentence of imprisonment” refers only to portion of sentence not suspended, thus 58 days spent in custody did not warrant two points); *United States v. Rodriguez-Lopez*, 170 F.3d 1244, 1246 (9th Cir. 1999) (per curiam) (adding two points for 62 days served); *see also* *United States v. Hall*, 531 F.3d 414, 419 (6th Cir. 2008) (“a defendant who receives full credit for time served on an entirely separate conviction does not in fact ‘actually serve’ any time for the offense in question.”).

<sup>23</sup> *See* *United States v. Rodriguez-Bernal*, 783 F.3d 1002, 1005–06 (5th Cir. 2015) (per curiam) (“suspended sentence” refers to a decision by a judge, not a government agency or correctional administrator).

<sup>24</sup> *United States v. Morgan*, 390 F.3d 1072, 1074 (8th Cir. 2004).

the Fifth Circuit held that incarceration in a boot camp was a prison sentence.<sup>25</sup> The court distinguished between facilities like the boot camp “requiring 24 hours a day physical confinement” and other dispositions such as “probation, fines, and residency in a halfway house.”<sup>26</sup> Work release programs also may constitute a sentence of imprisonment.<sup>27</sup> Generally, community-type confinement is deemed to be a “substitute for imprisonment” and not a “sentence of imprisonment.”<sup>28</sup> A six-month sentence of home detention is not considered a sentence of imprisonment.<sup>29</sup> Courts largely have held that community treatment centers or halfway houses are not imprisonment.<sup>30</sup>

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### **3.     *Felony Offense***

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A felony offense is any offense under federal, state, or local law that is punishable by a term of imprisonment exceeding one year, regardless of the actual sentence imposed.<sup>31</sup> This definition requires careful review of the law in jurisdictions where some misdemeanor

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<sup>25</sup> 166 F.3d 723 (5th Cir. 1999) (per curiam).

<sup>26</sup> *Id.* at 725–27.

<sup>27</sup> *United States v. Enrique-Ascencio*, 857 F.3d 668, 675 (5th Cir. 2017) (sentence that qualified under California’s work release program deemed sentence of imprisonment).

<sup>28</sup> USSG §5F1.2 (“Home detention may be imposed as a condition of probation or supervised release, but only as a substitute for imprisonment.”); *see United States v. Marks*, 864 F.3d 575, 581 (7th Cir. 2017) (sentences served in community treatment centers, halfway houses, home detention, or other forms of probation are not imprisonment for guideline purposes).

<sup>29</sup> *United States v. Gordon*, 346 F.3d 135, 138 (5th Cir. 2003) (per curiam) (“[T]he Guidelines define a ‘sentence of imprisonment’ as a ‘sentence of incarceration’ and distinguish between ‘imprisonment’ and ‘home detention.’”).

<sup>30</sup> *See, e.g., United States v. Sullivan*, 504 F.3d 969, 972 (9th Cir. 2007) (“detention at a community treatment center, where the defendant is not subject to the control of the Bureau of Prisons, is not ‘imprisonment’” (quoting *Reno v. Koray*, 515 U.S. 50, 59 (1995))); *United States v. Cintron-Fernandez*, 356 F.3d 340, 347 (1st Cir. 2004) (under §5C1.1(d) and (e) “home detention and community confinement are considered as ‘Substitute Punishments’ for imprisonment, not merely different forms of imprisonment itself.”); *United States v. Elkins*, 176 F.3d 1016, 1020 (7th Cir. 1999) (community confinement and home detention are substitutes for imprisonment); *United States v. Horek*, 137 F.3d 1226, 1229 (10th Cir. 1998) (community confinement, as a condition of probation, is not “imprisonment”); *United States v. Pielago*, 135 F.3d 703, 713 (11th Cir. 1998) (“the Sentencing Commission considered time served in community treatment centers and halfway houses to be equivalent to each other and distinct from a sentence of imprisonment.”); *United States v. Thomas*, 135 F.3d 873, 875 n.3 (2d Cir. 1998) (“We have, however, held that confinement in a community correctional center was not ‘imprisonment.’ It would, therefore, seem to follow that home detention is also not imprisonment.”). *But see United States v. Rasco*, 963 F.2d 132, 136–37 (6th Cir. 1992) (acknowledging possible conflict with §4A1.1, court focused on fact that placement in community treatment center was result of a sentence upon revocation of parole, and viewed sentence as part of original term of imprisonment and, thus, additional incarceration for purposes of §4A1.2(k)(1)).

<sup>31</sup> USSG §4A1.2(o).

offenses carry two- or three-year statutory maximums.<sup>32</sup> Relatedly, in at least one jurisdiction, certain classes of felonies are not punishable by more than one year and would not meet the definition.<sup>33</sup>

#### **4. Misdemeanor and Petty Offenses**

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Sentences for certain enumerated misdemeanors (*e.g.*, careless or reckless driving, gambling, driving without a license, disorderly conduct, prostitution, resisting arrest, and trespassing) “are counted only if (A) the sentence was a term of probation of more than one year or a term of imprisonment of at least thirty days, or (B) the prior offense was similar to an instant offense.”<sup>34</sup> Other petty offenses (*e.g.*, fish and game violations, juvenile status offenses, hitchhiking, loitering, minor traffic infractions, public intoxication, and vagrancy) never are counted.<sup>35</sup> Convictions for driving while intoxicated and other similar offenses always are counted.<sup>36</sup>

#### **5. Timing and Status Concerns**

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Whether a prior conviction is scored for the criminal history computation depends on several factors—the age of the prior conviction, the date of imposition of the sentence, the length of the prior sentence, and any sentence imposed upon revocation of the prior sentence—and on whether the prior conviction was for an offense committed before the age of 18.<sup>37</sup> Likewise, the status of the defendant at the time of the instant federal offense matters and may result in criminal history points.

##### **a. 15-year window for prior sentences greater than 13 months**

Under §4A1.2(e), three points are assigned to each adult sentence of imprisonment exceeding one year and one month that was imposed within 15 years of the defendant’s commencement of the instant offense *or* that resulted in incarceration of the defendant during any part of that 15-year period.<sup>38</sup> Section 4A1.2(e)(1) may require the scoring of

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<sup>32</sup> See, *e.g.*, *United States v. Coleman*, 635 F.3d 380, 381–82 (8th Cir. 2011) (state misdemeanor punishable by less than two years is a qualifying felony for career offender purposes).

<sup>33</sup> See, *e.g.*, *United States v. Simmons*, 649 F.3d 237, 244–45 (4th Cir. 2011) (en banc) (prior North Carolina felony that did not expose defendant to a term of imprisonment greater than one year was not a qualifying felony for purposes of a sentencing enhancement under 21 U.S.C. § 851).

<sup>34</sup> USSG §4A1.2(c)(1); see, *e.g.*, *United States v. Hawley*, 919 F.3d 252, 256 (4th Cir. 2019) (affirming imposition of criminal history point for 30-day imprisonment for an uncounseled misdemeanor offense).

<sup>35</sup> USSG §4A1.2(c)(2).

<sup>36</sup> USSG §4A1.2, comment. (n.5).

<sup>37</sup> USSG §4A1.2(d), (e).

<sup>38</sup> USSG §§4A1.1(a), 4A1.2(e)(1).

remote-in-time convictions, especially where a defendant was on parole or supervised release and was revoked and incarcerated during the 15-year period immediately preceding the instant offense.<sup>39</sup> The court will count a conviction of a defendant whose parole is revoked during the operative time period, even if the defendant is incarcerated for a new offense at the time of revocation.<sup>40</sup> A defendant on escape status is deemed incarcerated.<sup>41</sup>

**b. Ten-year window for sentences less than 13 months**

For prior sentences of less than 13 months' imprisonment, there is a ten-year time limitation, which runs from the date the prior sentence was imposed, not from when it was served.<sup>42</sup> Likewise, in the case of a revocation of supervision, the time limit runs from the original imposition date, not the revocation date, unless the length of the original sentence plus the revocation sentence exceeds 13 months.<sup>43</sup>

**c. Status of defendant at time of federal offense**

Two criminal history points are added if the instant offense was committed while the defendant was under a criminal justice sentence.<sup>44</sup> Among other things, this provision covers virtually all forms of suspended sentences.<sup>45</sup> However, a sentence where a fine is the

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<sup>39</sup> USSG §4A1.2(k)(2)(A); *see, e.g.*, *United States v. Allen*, 809 F.3d 1049, 1049–50 (8th Cir. 2016) (revocation of supervised release); *United States v. Semsak*, 336 F.3d 1123, 1127–28 (9th Cir. 2003) (revocation of parole).

<sup>40</sup> *Semsak*, 336 F.3d at 1128.

<sup>41</sup> *United States v. Pearson*, 312 F.3d 1287, 1289 (9th Cir. 2002) (quoting §4A1.2, comment. (n.2), in relevant part, “To qualify as a sentence of imprisonment, the defendant must actually have served a period of imprisonment on such sentences (or, if the defendant escaped would have served time).”).

<sup>42</sup> USSG §4A1.2(e)(2).

<sup>43</sup> USSG §4A1.2(k)(1), (e)(2); *see also* *United States v. Arviso-Mata*, 442 F.3d 382, 385 (5th Cir. 2006) (sentence “imposed” when defendant found guilty and sentence of probation was pronounced); *United States v. Arnold*, 213 F.3d 894, 895–96 (5th Cir. 2000) (“a sentence is ‘imposed’ when it is first pronounced by the court, and not when the term of imprisonment begins . . . [S]entence pronouncement is the sole, relevant event for purposes of §4A1.2(e)(2).”).

<sup>44</sup> USSG §4A1.1(d) (criminal justice sentence includes probation, parole, supervised release, imprisonment, work release, or escape status); *see also* *United States v. Caldwell*, 585 F.3d 1347, 1354–55 (10th Cir. 2009) (not under a “criminal justice sentence” where, at time of offense, defendant was on probation for driving while a habitual offender but had not served any portion of 30-day sentence).

<sup>45</sup> *See, e.g.*, *United States v. Perales*, 487 F.3d 588, 589 (8th Cir. 2007) (per curiam) (diversion); *United States v. Miller*, 56 F.3d 719, 721 (6th Cir. 1995) (conditional discharge sentence as “functional equivalent” of “unsupervised probation”); *United States v. Giraldo-Lara*, 919 F.2d 19, 22–23 (5th Cir. 1990) (deferred adjudication probation counted as a prior sentence although “does not involve a finding of guilt”); *see also* *United States v. Brown*, 909 F.3d 698, 700–01 (4th Cir. 2018) (suspended sentence in Virginia that is predicated on “good behavior” qualifies as criminal justice sentence under §4A1.1(d)).

only sanction is not considered to be a criminal justice sentence.<sup>46</sup> A defendant whose probation otherwise would have expired but for an outstanding revocation warrant is deemed to be under a criminal justice sentence even if the state did not use due diligence to execute the warrant.<sup>47</sup> A defendant who fails to report for service of a sentence of imprisonment shall be treated as having escaped and therefore is under a criminal justice sentence.<sup>48</sup>

#### **d. Offenses committed prior to age 18**

For an offense committed by the defendant before age 18 that resulted in an adult prison sentence exceeding 13 months within the prior 15-year period, three criminal history points are added.<sup>49</sup> For an offense committed before age 18 that resulted in a juvenile or adult sentence to confinement of at least 60 days, two points are added if the defendant was released from that confinement within five years of the instant offense.<sup>50</sup> Otherwise, one point is added for an offense committed before age 18 that resulted in a juvenile or adult sentence imposed within five years of the instant offense.<sup>51</sup>

Because states treat juvenile convictions in differing ways, it is the conduct involved and not the terminology that is important.<sup>52</sup> A sentence of commitment to the custody of the state's juvenile authority constitutes a sentence within the meaning of §4A1.2(d)(2).<sup>53</sup> The juvenile's age at the time of a revocation resulting in confinement, rather than at the time of the offense, controls.<sup>54</sup> Juvenile detention that did not result from an adjudication of guilt does not count.<sup>55</sup>

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<sup>46</sup> USSG §4A1.1, comment. (n.4); *see, e.g.*, *United States v. Spikes*, 543 F.3d 1021, 1023 (8th Cir. 2008) (fine alone is not criminal justice sentence).

<sup>47</sup> USSG §4A1.2(m); *see also* *United States v. McCowan*, 469 F.3d 386, 392–93 (5th Cir. 2006) (guidelines do not require a court to consider the diligence of state authorities in executing a warrant); *United States v. Anderson*, 184 F.3d 479, 480–81 (5th Cir. 1999) (per curiam) (guidelines do not require the court to assess the state authorities' diligence in executing a violation warrant).

<sup>48</sup> USSG §4A1.2(n); *see also* *United States v. Aska*, 314 F.3d 75, 77–79 (2d Cir. 2002); *United States v. Fisher*, 137 F.3d 1158, 1167 (9th Cir. 1998).

<sup>49</sup> USSG §4A1.2(d)(1); *United States v. Conca*, 635 F.3d 55, 65–66 (2d Cir. 2011) (affirming three criminal history points for an offense committed by the defendant before age 18).

<sup>50</sup> USSG §4A1.2(d)(2)(A); USSG §4A1.2, comment. (n.7).

<sup>51</sup> USSG §4A1.2(d)(2)(B).

<sup>52</sup> *See* *United States v. Stewart*, 643 F.3d 259, 263 (8th Cir. 2011).

<sup>53</sup> *See, e.g.*, *Howard v. United States*, 743 F.3d 459, 466 (6th Cir. 2014); *Stewart*, 643 F.3d at 263–64.

<sup>54</sup> *See* *United States v. Female Juvenile*, 103 F.3d 14, 17 (5th Cir. 1996).

<sup>55</sup> *See* *United States v. Ramirez*, 347 F.3d 792, 799 (9th Cir. 2003).

## 6. Military, Foreign, and Tribal Court Sentences

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Military sentences resulting from a general or special court-martial are counted. Sentences imposed as a result of a summary court-martial or Article 15 proceeding do not count.<sup>56</sup> Foreign sentences and tribal court sentences do not count but may be considered under §4A1.3 (Departures Based on Inadequacy of Criminal History Category (Policy Statement)).<sup>57</sup>

## 7. Sentences on Appeal and Diversionary Dispositions

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Prior sentences under appeal are counted. Where the execution of a prior sentence has been stayed pending appeal, subsections (a) through (e) of §4A1.1 still apply in computing criminal history.<sup>58</sup>

Diversions from the judicial system where no actual finding of guilt is made are not counted.<sup>59</sup> However, where diversion from the judicial system comes about after a finding of guilt has been made, or a plea of *nolo contendere* has been entered, the diversionary disposition should be counted as a 1-point sentence under §4A1.1(c).<sup>60</sup>

# III. CAREER OFFENDERS AND CRIMINAL LIVELIHOOD

Part B of Chapter Four provides instruction on how to calculate enhanced criminal history scores and offense levels for certain repeat offenders, such as career offenders, armed career criminals, and repeat and dangerous sex offenders against minors.

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<sup>56</sup> USSG §4A1.2(g).

<sup>57</sup> USSG §4A1.2(h), (i); *see also* USSG §4A1.3, comment. (n.2(C)) (listing factors, in addition to standard ones set forth in §4A1.3(a), to be considered in determining whether, or to what extent, upward departure based on tribal court conviction(s) may be warranted); *United States v. Brown*, 992 F.3d 665, 672 (8th Cir. 2021) (affirming upward departure based on defendant's underrepresented criminal history for multiple tribal convictions).

<sup>58</sup> USSG §4A1.2(l).

<sup>59</sup> USSG §4A1.2(f).

<sup>60</sup> *Id.*; *see also* *United States v. Miller*, 992 F.3d 322, 325–26 (4th Cir. 2021) (affirming addition of one criminal history point under §4A1.1(c) for a prior North Carolina conviction resolved through a prayer for judgment continued (a “PJC disposition”), a type of deferred disposition under which the court renders an adjudication of guilt but an entry of final judgment is not required); *United States v. Baptiste*, 876 F.3d 1057, 1062 (11th Cir. 2017) (finding, pursuant to §4A1.2(f), that Florida marijuana charge warranted one criminal history point because defendant had either pled guilty or *nolo contendere* to it despite receiving diversionary sentence).

**A. CAREER OFFENDER (§4B1.1)**

**1. General Application**

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An individual is a “career offender” if (1) he or she was at least 18 years old at the time of the instant offense, (2) the offense of conviction is a felony that is either a “crime of violence” or a “controlled substance offense,”<sup>61</sup> and (3) the defendant has at least two prior felony convictions of either a crime of violence or a controlled substance offense.<sup>62</sup>

**a. Offense level and criminal history category**

The guidelines provide significantly enhanced offense levels for career offenders, which are determined based on the statutory maximum for the offense of conviction.<sup>63</sup> Likewise, the guidelines establish that a career offender’s criminal history category is automatically VI in every case, regardless of what it is calculated to be under Chapter Four, Part A.<sup>64</sup>

**b. Career offender and 18 U.S.C. §§ 924(c), 929(a)**

The interplay between the career offender enhancement and 18 U.S.C. §§ 924(c) and 929(a)—offenses involving the use of firearms during an underlying crime of violence or controlled substance offense—warrants careful consideration.<sup>65</sup> If the defendant is convicted only of the firearms offense, the guideline range is 360 months to life, although the reduction for acceptance of responsibility is still available and can reduce the range by two or three levels.<sup>66</sup> If there are multiple counts of conviction, the applicable guideline range is the greater of (A) the mandatory minimum consecutive sentence required by 18 U.S.C. §§ 924(c) or 929(a) plus the guideline range for the underlying offense or (B) the guideline range derived from the career offender table for section 924(c) or section 929(a) offenders in §4B1.1(c)(3).<sup>67</sup> The sentence then is to be apportioned among the counts to

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<sup>61</sup> USSG §4B1.1(a); *see* USSG §4B1.2(a), (b) (defining “crime of violence” and “controlled substance offense”); *see also infra* Sections III(A)(2) and (3) for discussion of these terms.

<sup>62</sup> USSG §4B1.1(a); *see also* USSG §4B1.2, comment. (n.1) (conviction under 18 U.S.C. § 924(c) for using, carrying, or possessing firearm during violent felony or drug trafficking offense may qualify as predicate offense for career offender purposes).

<sup>63</sup> See the table set forth in USSG §4B1.1(b).

<sup>64</sup> *Id.*

<sup>65</sup> See USSG §4B1.1(c), the §4B1.1(c)(3) table, and §4B1.1, comment. (n.3); *see also* *United States v. Diaz*, 639 F.3d 616, 619–20 (3d Cir. 2011) (interdependence of career offender enhancements and convictions under § 924(c) requires close examination).

<sup>66</sup> USSG §4B1.1(c)(3).

<sup>67</sup> USSG §4B1.1(c)(2).

meet any mandatory minimum requirements.<sup>68</sup> If the defendant is not a career offender but has multiple convictions pursuant to section 924(c), the court can depart upward.<sup>69</sup> The court also can depart upward in the rare case that the defendant's guideline range is actually lower than if he had not sustained a section 924(c) conviction.<sup>70</sup>

**c. Acceptance of responsibility**

A career offender may receive a reduction for acceptance of responsibility pursuant to §3E1.1 (Acceptance of Responsibility). However, other Chapter Three adjustments, whether upward or downward, do not apply.<sup>71</sup>

**d. Predicate convictions**

*i. Adult convictions required*

Unlike other criminal history provisions, only adult convictions can serve as a predicate under the career offender guideline.<sup>72</sup> However, a defendant who was convicted as an adult but was under 18 can be considered a career offender.<sup>73</sup>

*ii. Predicate conviction must be prior to current offense*

Because the career offender enhancement applies to criminal "convictions," not sentences, the defendant must have been convicted of the offense before he committed the

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<sup>68</sup> USSG §5G1.2(e).

<sup>69</sup> USSG §2K2.4, comment. (n.2(B)).

<sup>70</sup> USSG §2K2.4, comment. (n.4).

<sup>71</sup> See USSG §1B1.1(a) (providing in application instructions that adjustments under Parts A, B, and C of Chapter Three are to be considered prior to operation of any potential Chapter Four, Part B overrides); see also *United States v. Cashaw*, 625 F.3d 271, 273–74 (5th Cir. 2010) (per curiam) (minor role adjustment not available to defendant sentenced under the career offender guidelines); *United States v. Warren*, 361 F.3d 1055, 1057–58 (8th Cir. 2004) (plain error to apply obstruction of justice enhancement to career offender offense level); *United States v. Perez*, 328 F.3d 96, 97–98 (2d Cir. 2003) (per curiam) (career offender cannot receive minor role reduction if it would result in offense level below career offender minimum).

<sup>72</sup> See USSG §4B1.2, comment. (n.1).

<sup>73</sup> *Id.*; see also, e.g., *United States v. Otero*, 495 F.3d 393, 400–01 (7th Cir. 2007) (affirming career offender designation based in part on a conviction as an adult when the defendant was a juvenile); *United States v. Moorer*, 383 F.3d 164, 168 (3d Cir. 2004) (same). But see *United States v. Mason*, 284 F.3d 555, 558–62 (4th Cir. 2002) (adult conviction did not count because defendant was sentenced as a juvenile).

instant federal offense.<sup>74</sup> The date of conviction is the date that the guilt of the defendant has been established, whether by guilty plea, trial, or plea of *nolo contendere*.<sup>75</sup>

*iii. Predicate convictions must be counted separately*

The prior convictions must be counted separately under the provisions of §4A1.1(a), (b), or (c) to qualify as predicate convictions for career offender purposes.<sup>76</sup> But, a sentence for a prior conviction that is included in a “single sentence” with a non-qualifying offense may be treated as a predicate offense if the sentences independently would have received criminal history points but for the single sentence rule.<sup>77</sup> However, “no more than one prior sentence in a given single sentence may be used as a predicate offense.”<sup>78</sup>

*iv. Predicate convictions must be scored*

Prior convictions must not be too old (*i.e.*, outside the time limits set forth in §4A1.2(d), (e)), and must receive criminal history points under §4A1.1(a), (b), or (c) to qualify as predicates for the career offender enhancement.<sup>79</sup> A prior sentence included in a single sentence, that is remote in time, and would not independently receive criminal history points, cannot serve as a predicate offense.

**e. Inchoate offenses**

The vast majority of circuits to address the issue agree that the career offender guideline includes convictions for inchoate offenses such as aiding and abetting, conspiring, and attempting to commit a “crime of violence” and “controlled substance offense”; a few circuits have held to the contrary.<sup>80</sup> Nevertheless, in various contexts, the circuit courts

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<sup>74</sup> USSG §4B1.2(c); *see also* United States v. Guerrero, 768 F.3d 351, 366–67 (5th Cir. 2014) (for purposes of the career criminal enhancement, it is the conviction and not the sentence that follows that counts).

<sup>75</sup> USSG §4B1.2(c).

<sup>76</sup> *Id.*

<sup>77</sup> USSG §4A1.2, comment. (n.3(A)).

<sup>78</sup> *Id.*

<sup>79</sup> *Id.*; *see also* United States v. Dewey, 599 F.3d 1010, 1014–15 (9th Cir. 2010) (affirming reliance on 18-year old sentence where defendant was incarcerated within previous 15 years).

<sup>80</sup> *See* USSG §4B1.2, comment. (n.1) (“‘Crime of violence’ and ‘controlled substance offense’ include the offenses of aiding and abetting, conspiring, and attempting to commit such offenses.”); *see, e.g.*, United States v. Medina-Campo, 714 F.3d 232, 240 (4th Cir. 2013) (solicitation of controlled substance offense included in career offender definition); United States v. Chavez, 660 F.3d 1215, 1228 (10th Cir. 2011) (“We conclude that the Commission acted within this broad grant of authority in construing attempts to commit drug crimes as controlled substance offenses for purposes of determining career offender status.”); United States v. Shumate, 329 F.3d 1026, 1030 (9th Cir. 2003) (the word “include” in Application Note 1 to §4B1.2

continue to scrutinize predicate conviction statutes to ensure the requisite intent to distribute required by the definition of a “controlled substance offense.”<sup>81</sup>

## ***2. Crime of Violence (§4B1.2(a))***

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The career offender guidelines define the term “crime of violence” as follows:

[A]ny offense under federal or state law, punishable by imprisonment for a term exceeding one year, that—

- (1) has as an element the use, attempted use, or threatened use of physical force against the person of another, or
- (2) is murder, voluntary manslaughter, kidnapping, aggravated assault, a forcible sex offense, robbery, arson, extortion, or the use

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allows inclusion of solicitation for crimes of violence and for controlled substance offenses); *United States v. Smith*, 54 F.3d 690, 693 (11th Cir. 1995) (“[W]e hold that the Commission, in construing attempts to commit narcotics crimes as controlled substance offenses for purposes of determining career offender status, acted within its authority pursuant to section 994(a).”); *United States v. Mendoza-Figueroa*, 65 F.3d 691, 694 (8th Cir. 1995) (en banc) (commentary including drug conspiracies “is reasonable interpretation of the career offender guidelines that is well within the Sentencing Commission’s statutory authority.”); *United States v. Jackson*, 60 F.3d 128, 133 (2d Cir. 1995) (“[W]e conclude that both 28 U.S.C. §§ 994(a) and 994(h) vested the Commission with authority to expand the definition of ‘controlled substance offense’ to include aiding and abetting, conspiring, and attempting to commit such offenses.”). *But see* *United States v. Nasir*, 982 F.3d 144, 159 (3d Cir. 2020) (en banc) (the definition of “controlled substance offense” in the career offender guideline at §4B1.2(b) does not include inchoate offenses because inchoate offenses are listed only in the commentary rather than the plain text of the guideline); *United States v. Havis*, 927 F.3d 382, 386–87 (6th Cir. 2019) (en banc) (“The text of §4B1.2(b) controls, and it makes clear that attempt crimes do not qualify as controlled substance offenses.”); *United States v. Winstead*, 890 F.3d 1082, 1091 (D.C. Cir. 2018) (“Section 4B1.2(b) presents a very detailed ‘definition’ of controlled substance offense that clearly excludes inchoate offenses.”).

<sup>81</sup> See USSG §4B1.2(b) (defining “controlled substance offense”); *infra* Section III(A)(3) (discussing this term); *see also, e.g.*, *United States v. Johnson*, 945 F.3d 174, 183 (4th Cir. 2019) (Maryland “offer to sell” statute proscribed intentional conduct, consistent with §4B1.2); *United States v. Mohamed*, 920 F.3d 94, 99 (1st Cir. 2019) (“We have held that the definition of ‘controlled substance offense’ requires that the statute under which the defendant was charged involve[] an intent to distribute or other indicia of trafficking.”); *United States v. Lopez-Salas*, 513 F.3d 174, 180 (5th Cir. 2008) (“The Guidelines could have defined a drug trafficking offense based on the quantity of drugs possessed. Instead, they require that a state prove an intent to manufacture, import, export, distribute, or dispense.”); *United States v. Villa-Lara*, 451 F.3d 963, 965–66 (9th Cir. 2006) (focusing on the guidelines’ definition of a drug trafficking offense to conclude that the defendant’s Nevada trafficking by possession conviction did not qualify); *United States v. Montanez*, 442 F.3d 485, 488 (6th Cir. 2006) (“[U]nder the Guidelines, simple possession—that is, possession without the proof beyond a reasonable doubt of the requisite intent to ‘manufacture, import, export, distribute, or dispense’—is not a controlled substance offense.”); *United States v. Herrera-Roldan*, 414 F.3d 1238, 1241 (10th Cir. 2005) (rejecting the government’s argument that the guidelines permit an inference of intent to distribute based on the defendant’s possession of more than 50 pounds of marijuana); *United States v. Hernandez*, 218 F.3d 272, 278 (3d Cir. 2000) (New York penal law criminalizes an intent crime, consistent with the career offender definition).

or unlawful possession of a firearm described in 26 U.S.C. § 5845(a) or explosive material as defined in 18 U.S.C. § 841(c).<sup>82</sup>

The “crime of violence” definition is used to determine not only whether a defendant’s sentence is subject to the career offender enhancement in §4B1.1, but also whether a defendant’s sentence is subject to enhancement in other guidelines.<sup>83</sup> In addition, it is used to determine whether an upward departure may be warranted under §5K2.17 (Semiautomatic Firearms Capable of Accepting Large Capacity Magazine (Policy Statement)).

### **3. Controlled Substance Offense (§4B1.2(b))**

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The career offender guidelines define a “controlled substance offense” as follows:

[A]n offense under federal or state law, punishable by imprisonment for a term exceeding one year, that prohibits the manufacture, import, export, distribution, or dispensing of a controlled substance (or a counterfeit substance) or the possession of a controlled substance (or a counterfeit substance) with intent to manufacture, import, export, distribute, or dispense.<sup>84</sup>

#### **a. Predicate drug offense punishable by more than one year**

Note that this guideline covers drug trafficking offenses punishable by more than one year and therefore applies to a number of drug offenses that are not covered by the Armed Career Criminal Act (ACCA), a repeat offender statute that limits predicate “serious drug offense” convictions triggering enhanced penalties to offenses for which a maximum term of imprisonment of ten years or more is prescribed by law.<sup>85</sup> In fact, some state misdemeanor convictions even may qualify under the definition of “controlled substance offense.”<sup>86</sup>

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<sup>82</sup> USSG §4B1.2(a).

<sup>83</sup> See *id.*; see also, e.g., USSG §§2K1.3(a)(1)–(2) & comment. (n.2), 2K2.1(a)(1), (2), (3)(B), (4)(A) & comment. (n.1), 2K2.1(b)(5) & comment. (n.13(A), (B)), 2S1.1(b)(1)(B)(ii) & comment. (n.1), 4A1.1(e) & comment. (n.5).

<sup>84</sup> USSG §4B1.2(b).

<sup>85</sup> 18 U.S.C. § 924(e)(2)(A).

<sup>86</sup> See “felony” definition at USSG §4A1.2(o); see also USSG §4B1.1, comment. (n.4) (noting possibility that downward departure may be warranted in case where one or both predicates are classified as misdemeanor(s) at time of sentencing for instant federal offense).

**b. Predicate drug convictions limited to drug trafficking offenses**

Unlike statutory drug enhancements (*e.g.*, 21 U.S.C. § 841(b)), this guideline provision is limited to trafficking-type offenses and does not cover mere possession of a controlled substance.<sup>87</sup>

**c. Specific listed offenses**

The commentary to §4B1.2 lists other types of drug offenses that may qualify as a “controlled substance offense” including: possession of listed chemicals and equipment with intent to manufacture a controlled substance (21 U.S.C. §§ 841(c)(1), 843(a)(6)), using a communication facility to commit a felony drug offense (21 U.S.C. § 843(b)), and maintaining premises to facilitate a drug offense (21 U.S.C. § 856).<sup>88</sup>

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**4. Categorical Approach and Modified Categorical Approach**

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The categorical approach and modified categorical approach apply to the determination of whether an offense is a “crime of violence” or “controlled substance offense.”<sup>89</sup>

**B. CRIMINAL LIVELIHOOD (§4B1.3)**

If the defendant committed an offense as part of a pattern of criminal conduct engaged in as a livelihood, his offense level must be at least 13 unless a reduction for acceptance of responsibility applies, in which case the minimum offense level shall be 11.<sup>90</sup>

The term “pattern of criminal conduct” “means planned criminal acts occurring over a substantial period of time.”<sup>91</sup> The term “engaged in as a livelihood” means:

(A) the defendant derived income from the pattern of criminal conduct that in any twelve-month period exceeded 2,000 times the then existing hourly minimum wage under federal law; and (B) the totality of circumstances shows

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<sup>87</sup> See, *e.g.*, *Salinas v. United States*, 547 U.S. 188 (2006) (per curiam) (Fifth Circuit erred in treating the defendant’s conviction for simple possession as a “controlled substance offense”); *United States v. Gaitan*, 954 F.2d 1005, 1011 (5th Cir. 1992) (district court erred in finding the defendant’s state possession convictions qualified as a predicate drug-trafficking offense).

<sup>88</sup> USSG §4B1.2, comment. (n.1).

<sup>89</sup> See Section IV *infra.*; see also U.S. SENT’G COMM’N, PRIMER ON CATEGORICAL APPROACH (2021), <https://www.ussc.gov/guidelines/primers/categorical-approach> [hereinafter CATEGORICAL APPROACH PRIMER].

<sup>90</sup> USSG §4B1.3.

<sup>91</sup> USSG §4B1.3, comment. (n.1).

that such criminal conduct was the defendant's primary occupation in that twelve-month period . . . .<sup>92</sup>

The full-face value of stolen checks and gross income from drug trafficking have been used to calculate the defendant's derived income for purposes of applying the enhancement.<sup>93</sup>

## **C. ARMED CAREER CRIMINAL (§4B1.4)**

### **1. General Application**

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A defendant convicted of a violation of 18 U.S.C. § 922(g)—a firearms offense—who has three prior convictions for a “violent felony” or “serious drug offense,” or both, committed on occasions different from one another, is considered an “armed career criminal.”<sup>94</sup> Such a defendant is subject to an enhanced sentence under the ACCA (18 U.S.C. § 924(e)), and different treatment under the guidelines.

#### **a. Offense level and criminal history category**

Section 4B1.4 provides that the offense level for an armed career criminal is the greatest of the following:

- (1) the offense level applicable from Chapters Two and Three;
- (2) the offense level from §4B1.1 (Career Offender), if applicable;
- (3) an offense level of 34 if the defendant used or possessed the firearm or ammunition in connection with a crime of violence or a controlled substance offense, or possessed a firearm described in 26 U.S.C. § 5845(a); or
- (4) an offense level of 33 in other circumstances.<sup>95</sup>

The criminal history category is calculated as the greatest of the following:

- (1) the category determined under Chapter Four, Part A or under the Career Offender Guideline, if applicable; or
- (2) Category VI, if the defendant used or possessed a firearm or ammunition in connection with either a crime of violence or a

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<sup>92</sup> USSG §4B1.3, comment. (n.2).

<sup>93</sup> See *United States v. Gordon*, 852 F.3d 126, 132 (1st Cir. 2017); *United States v. Quertermous*, 946 F.2d 375, 377–78 (5th Cir. 1991).

<sup>94</sup> See 18 U.S.C. § 924(e); USSG §4B1.4, comment. (n.1).

<sup>95</sup> USSG §4B1.4(b).

controlled substance offense, or possessed a firearm described in 26 U.S.C. § 5845(a)<sup>96</sup>; or

(3) Category IV.

**b. Armed career criminal and sections 844(h), 924(c), or 929(a)**

Sections 4B1.4(b)(3)(A) and (c)(2) do not apply if a defendant also is convicted of violating 18 U.S.C. §§ 844(h), 924(c), or 929(a)—statutes related to using explosives or firearms in connection with other offenses—because the penalties required by those statutes already account for the conduct covered by these guideline sections.<sup>97</sup> However, if the maximum penalty resulting from the guideline range, combined with the mandatory consecutive sentences required by these statutes, is lower than the maximum penalty that would have resulted if the guideline provisions applied, an upward departure may be warranted. Note that the upward departure has a cap—the maximum of the otherwise applicable guideline range.<sup>98</sup>

**c. Acceptance of responsibility**

Acceptance of responsibility reductions under §3E1.1 are available for armed career criminals and will decrease the offense level, but not below the statutorily required minimum sentence of 180 months.<sup>99</sup>

**d. Predicate convictions**

Unlike the career offender guideline, the armed career criminal statute, 18 U.S.C. § 924(e), does not provide for time limitations on predicate convictions. It also refers to convictions “committed on occasions different from one another,” rather than using §4B1.2’s requirement that sentences for such convictions count separately. In addition, burglary is included as a predicate offense, unlike in the career offender context.<sup>100</sup>

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<sup>96</sup> USSG §4B1.4(c); *see also* U.S. SENT’G COMM’N, PRIMER ON FIREARMS (2021), <https://www.ussc.gov/guidelines/primers/firearms>.

<sup>97</sup> USSG §4B1.4, comment. (n.2).

<sup>98</sup> *Id.*

<sup>99</sup> *See* United States v. Collins, 683 F.3d 697, 708 n.1 (6th Cir. 2012) (regardless of the application of §3E1.1, the defendant’s mandatory minimum sentence was 180 months because he qualified as an armed career criminal).

<sup>100</sup> Compare 18 U.S.C. § 924(e)(2)(B)(ii), with USSG §4B1.2(a)(2).

## 2. Violent Felony

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With respect to armed career criminals, the term “violent felony” means:

Any crime punishable by imprisonment for a term exceeding one year, or any act of juvenile delinquency involving the use or carrying of a firearm, knife, or destructive device that would be punishable by imprisonment for such term if committed by an adult, that:

- (1) has as an element the use, attempted use, or threatened use of physical force against the person of another; or
- (2) is burglary, arson, or extortion, involves the use of explosives, or *otherwise involves conduct that presents a serious potential risk of physical injury to another*.<sup>101</sup>

## 3. Serious Drug Offense

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The term serious drug offense refers to an offense under 21 U.S.C. § 801 et seq., 21 U.S.C. § 951 et seq., or 46 U.S.C. § 70501 et seq., or an offense under state law involving manufacturing, distributing, or possessing with intent to manufacture or distribute, a controlled substance for which “a maximum term of imprisonment of ten years or more is prescribed by law.”<sup>102</sup>

## 4. Categorical Approach and Modified Categorical Approach

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The categorical approach and modified categorical approach apply to the determination whether an offense is a “violent felony” or “serious drug offense.”<sup>103</sup>

### D. REPEAT AND DANGEROUS SEX OFFENDER AGAINST MINORS (§4B1.5)

#### 1. General Application

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If the defendant’s instant offense is a covered sex crime,<sup>104</sup> and the defendant has a prior qualifying sex offense conviction, or has engaged in a pattern of activity involving

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<sup>101</sup> 18 U.S.C. § 924(e)(2)(B) (emphasis added). In *Johnson v. United States*, the Supreme Court invalidated the italicized portion of the definition of “violent felony” as unconstitutionally void for vagueness under the Fifth Amendment’s Due Process Clause. 135 S. Ct. 2551 (2015).

<sup>102</sup> 18 U.S.C. § 924(e)(2)(A).

<sup>103</sup> See CATEGORICAL APPROACH PRIMER, *supra* note 89.

<sup>104</sup> USSG §4B1.5, comment. (n.2) (listing the “covered sex crime[s]” as “(A) an offense, perpetrated against a minor, under (i) chapter 109A of title 18, United States Code; (ii) chapter 110 of such title, not including trafficking in, receipt of, or possession of, child pornography, or a recordkeeping offense; (iii) chapter 117 of

prohibited sexual conduct, then the defendant is subject to the overrides set forth in §4B1.5.

**a. Offense level and criminal history category**

If the defendant has a prior qualifying sex offense conviction and is not a career offender, then the offense level shall be the greater of: (1) the offense level determined under Chapters Two and Three; or (2) the offense level taken from the table set forth in §4B1.5(a)(1)(B), decreased by any applicable reduction for acceptance of responsibility under §3E1.1.<sup>105</sup> The criminal history category for such defendants is the greater of the criminal history determined under Chapter Four, Part A (Criminal History), or Criminal History Category V.<sup>106</sup>

If the defendant is not a career offender and the provision above does not apply because the defendant does not have a prior qualifying sex conviction, a 5-level enhancement under §4B1.5(b) instead will be applied if “the defendant engaged in a pattern of activity involving prohibited sexual conduct.”<sup>107</sup>

**b. Acceptance of responsibility**

Acceptance of responsibility reductions under §3E1.1 are available to defendants subject to §4B1.5.

**c. Predicate convictions**

In 2014, the Sixth Circuit concluded that the time limitations concerning use of prior convictions set forth in §4A1.2 do not limit the potential use of prior convictions to trigger an enhancement under §4B1.5.<sup>108</sup> Furthermore, the Eighth Circuit has found that §4B1.5(a) applies to a defendant whose prior sex conviction is based on an adjudication of guilt but has not yet been sentenced for that particular offense.<sup>109</sup>

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such title, not including transmitting information about a minor or filing a factual statement about an alien individual; or (iv) 18 U.S.C. § 1591; or (B) an attempt or a conspiracy to commit any [such] offense”).

<sup>105</sup> USSG §4B1.5(a)(1).

<sup>106</sup> USSG §4B1.5(a)(2).

<sup>107</sup> USSG §4B1.5(b).

<sup>108</sup> *United States v. Babcock*, 753 F.3d 587, 591–92 (6th Cir. 2014).

<sup>109</sup> *United States v. Leach*, 491 F.3d 858, 865–68 (8th Cir. 2007).

## 2. Categorical Approach and Modified Categorical Approach

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The categorical approach and modified categorical approach apply to the determination of whether an offense is a qualifying prior sex conviction.<sup>110</sup>

### **IV. CATEGORICAL APPROACH AND MODIFIED CATEGORICAL APPROACH**

The following is a brief discussion of the categorical approach.<sup>111</sup> As discussed above, certain sentencing guidelines and federal statutes provide enhanced penalties for offenders whose criminal histories evidence violence or other types of serious felony conduct. Typically, the guidelines that require the categorical approach are §§4B1.1 and 4B1.2 (Career Offender), 4B1.4 (Armed Career Criminal), 4B1.5 (Repeat and Dangerous Sex Offender Against Minors), and 2L1.2 (Unlawful Entering or Remaining in the United States). The relevant statutes include 18 U.S.C. § 16 (Crime of Violence Definition), 18 U.S.C. § 924(e) (ACCA), 18 U.S.C. § 2252 (Prior Sex Offense Convictions), and 8 U.S.C. § 1326 (Reentry of Removed Aliens).

Sentencing and appellate courts have interpreted terms found within these provisions, such as “crime of violence” or “serious drug offense” through application of the “categorical approach,” first mandated by the Supreme Court in *Taylor v. United States*,<sup>112</sup> and the “modified categorical approach” that was introduced and discussed by the Supreme Court in *Shepard v. United States*,<sup>113</sup> and further clarified in *Descamps v. United States*<sup>114</sup> and *Mathis v. United States*.<sup>115</sup> Although these cases dealt with statutory enhancements in the ACCA (18 U.S.C. § 924(e)), lower courts have applied the same principles concerning the categorical approach in other contexts where a sentencing enhancement is based on a prior conviction, including the career offender guideline.<sup>116</sup>

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<sup>110</sup> See CATEGORICAL APPROACH PRIMER, *supra* note 89; see also *United States v. Dahl*, 833 F.3d 345 (3rd Cir. 2016) (concluding it was plain error for district court to fail to apply categorical approach in determining applicability of enhancement under §4B1.5).

<sup>111</sup> For an in-depth look at the process, history, and caselaw concerning this doctrine, see CATEGORICAL APPROACH PRIMER, *supra*, note 89.

<sup>112</sup> 495 U.S. 575 (1990).

<sup>113</sup> 544 U.S. 13 (2005).

<sup>114</sup> 570 U.S. 254 (2013).

<sup>115</sup> 136 S. Ct. 2243 (2016).

<sup>116</sup> See, e.g., *United States v. Herrick*, 545 F.3d 53, 58 (1st Cir. 2008) (noting extensive precedent requiring application of case law interpreting § 924(e)’s definition of “violent felony” to §4B1.2(a)’s definition of “crime of violence”).

## 1. *Categorical Approach*

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The categorical approach first was adopted in *Taylor v. United States*.<sup>117</sup> Under the categorical approach, courts must look to the statutory elements of an offense, rather than the defendant's conduct, when determining the nature of a prior conviction. Thus, *Taylor* held that when deciding whether a prior conviction falls within a certain class of crimes, a sentencing court may "look only to the fact of conviction and the statutory definition of the prior offense."<sup>118</sup> A court should not consider the "facts underlying the prior convictions;" in other words, the court may not focus on the underlying criminal conduct itself.<sup>119</sup> This form of analysis permits a federal sentencing court to examine only the statute under which the defendant sustained a conviction (and, in certain cases, judicial documents surrounding that conviction) in determining whether the prior conviction fits within a federal predicate definition.

In *Descamps*, the Supreme Court explained that, under the categorical approach, the comparison is between the elements of the offense underlying the prior conviction and the elements of the generic offense.<sup>120</sup> If the "relevant statute has the same elements as the 'generic' ACCA crime, then the prior conviction can serve as an ACCA predicate; so too if the statute defines the crime more narrowly."<sup>121</sup> But, a "state crime cannot qualify as an ACCA predicate if its elements are broader than those of a listed generic offense."<sup>122</sup>

## 2. *Modified Categorical Approach*

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The modified categorical approach only may be used "when a prior conviction is for violating a 'divisible statute'—one that sets out one or more of the elements in the alternative, *e.g.*, burglary involving entry into a building *or* an automobile."<sup>123</sup> Under the modified categorical approach, sentencing courts may consult a limited class of documents, such as indictments and jury instructions, to determine which alternative element formed the basis of the defendant's prior conviction.

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<sup>117</sup> 495 U.S. 575 (1990).

<sup>118</sup> *Id.* at 602.

<sup>119</sup> *Id.* at 600–02; *see also* *Kawashima v. Holder*, 565 U.S. 478, 483 (2012) ("[W]e employ a categorical approach by looking to the statute defining the crime of conviction, rather than to the specific facts underlying the crime.").

<sup>120</sup> *Descamps*, 570 U.S. at 263–64.

<sup>121</sup> *Id.* at 261.

<sup>122</sup> *Mathis v. United States*, 136 S. Ct. 2243, 2251 (2016).

<sup>123</sup> *Descamps*, 570 U.S. at 254.

For a prior trial conviction, the sentencing court may consult judicial records such as the indictment and jury instructions.<sup>124</sup> For a prior guilty plea conviction, the sentencing court's review is "limited to the terms of the charging document, the terms of a plea agreement or transcript of colloquy between judge and defendant in which the factual basis for the plea was confirmed by the defendant, or to some comparable judicial record of this information."<sup>125</sup> In the absence of supporting documents that limit the scope of a conviction under a divisible statute, the enhancement does not apply.<sup>126</sup>

"The modified approach serves—and serves solely—as a tool to identify the elements of the crime of conviction when a statute's disjunctive phrasing renders one (or more) of them opaque."<sup>127</sup> Once the elements of the crime of conviction are identified, the categorical approach is followed, *i.e.*, "the elements of the offense of conviction are compared with the elements of the statutory offense and only if they align may the offense count."<sup>128</sup>

*Descamps* held that "sentencing courts may not apply the modified categorical approach when the crime of which the defendant was convicted has a single, indivisible set of elements."<sup>129</sup> In other words, the sentencing court cannot look at the documents as defined in *Taylor* in a trial conviction, or the documents set forth in *Shepard* in the context of a conviction upon a plea, in such circumstances.<sup>130</sup> *Descamps* clarified that "*Taylor* recognized a 'narrow range of cases' in which sentencing courts—applying what we would later dub the 'modified categorical approach'—may look beyond the statutory elements to 'the charging paper and jury instructions' used in a case."<sup>131</sup>

In *Mathis*, the Court held that when the predicate conviction statute enumerates factual means of committing a single element of an offense, those alternative factual means are not elements of the offense.<sup>132</sup> Therefore, the "first task for a sentencing court faced

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<sup>124</sup> *Id.* at 257.

<sup>125</sup> *Shepard v. United States*, 544 U.S. 13, 26 (2005).

<sup>126</sup> *See, e.g.*, *United States v. Rendon-Duarte*, 490 F.3d 1142, 1146 (9th Cir. 2007) (plain error for the district court to rely solely on the factual description of the offense in the presentence report); *United States v. Pimentel-Flores*, 339 F.3d 959, 969 (9th Cir. 2003) (conviction for "assault in violation of a court order" could not categorically be crime of violence where government did not provide statute of conviction).

<sup>127</sup> *Mathis*, 136 S. Ct. at 2253 (citing *Descamps*, 570 U.S. at 263–65).

<sup>128</sup> *United States v. Faust*, 853 F.3d 39, 51 (1st Cir. 2017).

<sup>129</sup> *Descamps*, 570 U.S. at 258.

<sup>130</sup> *See, e.g.*, *United States v. Tanksley*, 848 F.3d 347, 350–54 (5th Cir. 2017) (the modified categorical approach is inappropriate in this case as the defendant was convicted under state statute with a single, indivisible set of elements); *United States v. Hinkle*, 832 F.3d 569, 574–75 (5th Cir. 2016) (same).

<sup>131</sup> *Descamps*, 570 U.S. at 261.

<sup>132</sup> *Mathis*, 136 S. Ct. at 2253–54.

with an alternatively phrased statute is thus to determine whether its listed items are elements or means.”<sup>133</sup> The Court went further and identified aids to be used to determine if a statute enumerates alternative elements or factual means. Specifically, the Court explained that, in making this determination, the sentencing court may examine state supreme court opinions, review the statute to determine whether it provides different punishments for each alternative,<sup>134</sup> and examine any “illustrative examples” provided in the statute. Additionally, if the “state law fails to provide clear answers,” the sentencing court may take a “peek at the record documents” to determine if the “listed items are elements of the offense.”<sup>135</sup>

## **V. DEPARTURES**

In addition to establishing the general rules to be used in calculating an individual’s criminal history category, Part A of Chapter Four also provides guidance for potential upward and downward departures from the criminal history category where it either overstates or understates the seriousness of the defendant’s criminal record or his or her risk of recidivism.<sup>136</sup> The availability of the departures is limited, particularly for career and sex offenders.

### **A. UPWARD DEPARTURES (§4A1.3(A))**

An upward departure may be warranted if “reliable information indicates that the defendant’s criminal history category substantially under-represents the seriousness of the defendant’s criminal history or the likelihood that the defendant will commit other crimes.”<sup>137</sup>

#### **1. Basis for Upward Departure**

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Factors to be considered in considering the imposition and, if so imposed, degree of an upward departure are set forth in subdivisions (A) through (E) of §4A1.3(a)(2) and include the following.

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<sup>133</sup> *Id.* at 2256.

<sup>134</sup> *Id.*

<sup>135</sup> *Id.* at 2247, 2256.

<sup>136</sup> *See* USSG §4A1.3(a), (b).

<sup>137</sup> USSG §4A1.3(a)(1).

**a. Prior sentence not used in criminal history score**

The court may rely on a sentence not used in computing criminal history, such as tribal or foreign convictions.<sup>138</sup> If the conviction and sentence at issue derive from a tribal court, the commentary to §4A1.3 lists six additional factors courts should consider in determining whether that conviction should serve as the basis for an upward departure.<sup>139</sup> This non-exhaustive list includes whether:

- (i) The defendant was represented by a lawyer, had the right to a trial by jury, and received other due process protections consistent with those provided to criminal defendants under the United States Constitution.
- (ii) The defendant received the due process protections required for criminal defendants under the Indian Civil Rights Act of 1968, Public Law 90–284, as amended.
- (iii) The tribe was exercising expanded jurisdiction under the Tribal Law and Order Act of 2010, Public Law 111–211.
- (iv) The tribe was exercising expanded jurisdiction under the Violence Against Women Reauthorization Act of 2013, Public Law 113–4.
- (v) The tribal court conviction is not based on the same conduct that formed the basis for a conviction from another jurisdiction that receives criminal history points pursuant to this Chapter.
- (vi) The tribal court conviction is for an offense that otherwise would be counted under §4A1.2 (Definitions and Instructions for Computing Criminal History).<sup>140</sup>

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<sup>138</sup> USSG §4A1.3(a)(2)(A); *see also* United States v. Lente, 759 F.3d 1149, 1167 (10th Cir. 2014) (affirming district court’s reliance on two prior tribal convictions to depart upward based on an underrepresented criminal history).

<sup>139</sup> *See* USSG §4A1.3, comment. (n.(2)(C)). Tribal court convictions are excluded from the criminal history score but have served as the bases for upward departures since the initial 1987 sentencing guidelines. In recent years, some tribal courts have gained enhanced sentencing authority under the Tribal Law and Order Act of 2010, Pub. L. No. 111–211, § 201, 124 Stat. 2258, 2261 and expanded jurisdiction over non-Indian defendants in domestic abuse cases under the Violence Against Women Act Reauthorization Act of 2013, Pub. L. No. 113–4, 127 Stat. 54. Many tribal courts also have begun to increase due process protections and reliable record-keeping. Given these developments, the Commission in 2018 amended the guidelines to provide “guidance to courts on how to apply the departure provision at §4A1.3 in cases involving a defendant with a history of tribal convictions.” USSG App C, amend. 805 (effective Nov. 1, 2018).

<sup>140</sup> USSG §4A1.3, comment. (n.(2)(C)).

**b. Prior sentence substantially longer than one year**

Prior sentences of substantially more than one year imposed as a result of independent crimes committed on different occasions may form the basis for an upward departure.<sup>141</sup>

**c. Similar misconduct established by an alternative proceeding**

The court may consider prior misconduct adjudicated in a civil proceeding or by a failure to comply with an administrative order that is similar to the instant offense.<sup>142</sup>

**d. Whether the defendant was pending trial or sentencing**

The court may consider whether the defendant was pending trial or sentencing on another charge at the time of the instant offense.<sup>143</sup>

**e. Prior similar conduct not resulting in a criminal conviction**

Similar adult criminal conduct not resulting in conviction may be relied upon for an upward departure.<sup>144</sup> Note that the offense(s) must be similar<sup>145</sup> and, according to some courts, significant.<sup>146</sup>

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<sup>141</sup> USSG §4A1.3(a)(2)(B); *see* *United States v. Bolt*, 782 F.3d 388, 391 (8th Cir. 2015) (prior sentences of substantially more than one year resulting from independent crimes committed on different occasions not used to calculate criminal history score may be used for upward departure based on inadequacy of the defendant's criminal history category).

<sup>142</sup> USSG §4A1.3(a)(2)(C); *see* *United States v. Beltramea*, 785 F.3d 287, 289–90 (8th Cir. 2015) (affirming upward departure for understated criminal history based on a civil judgment in the defendant's fraud case).

<sup>143</sup> USSG §4A1.3(a)(2)(D); *see* *United States v. Hernandez*, 896 F.2d 642, 644 (1st Cir. 1990) (affirming upward departure under §4A1.3(a)(2)(D) as defendant committed his federal offense while on bail awaiting trial for state offenses).

<sup>144</sup> USSG §4A1.3(a)(2)(E); *see Bolt*, 782 F.3d at 392 (affirming upward departure under §4A1.3(a)(2)(E) for defendant's numerous arrests for similar criminal conduct which did not result in convictions); *United States v. Hefferon*, 314 F.3d 211, 227–28 (5th Cir. 2002) (same); *United States v. Luna-Trujillo*, 868 F.2d 122, 124–25 (5th Cir. 1989) (same).

<sup>145</sup> *See* *United States v. Allen*, 488 F.3d 1244, 1257–58 (10th Cir. 2007) (departure not justified as prior conduct distinctly dissimilar from the crime of conviction).

<sup>146</sup> *See, e.g., United States v. Martinez-Perez*, 916 F.2d 1020, 1025 (5th Cir. 1990) (departure not justified by remote misdemeanor conviction).

## **2. Other Considerations**

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### **a. Nature of prior conviction**

The nature, rather than the number, of prior convictions may be more indicative of the seriousness of a defendant's criminal record and can be the basis for a departure.<sup>147</sup>

### **b. Previous lenient treatment**

The court also may depart because the defendant previously received "extreme" leniency for a serious offense.<sup>148</sup>

### **c. Relevant conduct**

The court cannot rely on a prior conviction as the basis for a departure if the court previously determined that the conduct underlying that conviction is relevant conduct to the instant offense and considers it in calculating the offense level.<sup>149</sup>

### **d. Prior arrests without conviction**

The court cannot depart based on a prior arrest record itself.<sup>150</sup>

### **e. Interplay with categorical approach**

In *United States v. Gutierrez-Hernandez*, the district court departed above the guideline range because a misdemeanor state firearm conviction could have been prosecuted as a more serious federal felony, and the police report suggested that a drug conviction was a trafficking offense even though the categorical approach prohibited

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<sup>147</sup> USSG §4A1.3, comment. (n.2(B)); *see, e.g.*, *United States v. Kortgaard*, 425 F.3d 602, 608 (9th Cir. 2005) ("[I]t is the quality of the defendant's criminal history not the quantity which is decisive.") (citation omitted).

<sup>148</sup> USSG §4A1.3, comment. (backg'd); *see United States v. Delgado-Nunez*, 295 F.3d 494, 497–98 (5th Cir. 2002) (affirming upward departure based on "extremely lenient treatment" of defendant's prior conduct).

<sup>149</sup> USSG §4A1.2, comment. (n.1) (defining the conduct underlying a "prior sentence" and "relevant conduct" as mutually exclusive); USSG §1B1.1, comment. (n.1(I)) (defining the term "offense" as "the offense of conviction and all relevant conduct under §1B1.3 [(Relevant Conduct)] . . . unless a different meaning is specified or is otherwise clear from the context."); *see United States v. Cade*, 279 F.3d 265, 270–73 (5th Cir. 2002) (§4A1.2 defines prior sentences and relevant conduct as mutually exclusive); *United States v. Hunerlach*, 258 F.3d 1282, 1286–87 (11th Cir. 2001) (same).

<sup>150</sup> USSG §4A1.3(a)(3); *see Williams v. United States*, 503 U.S. 193, 206 (1992) (remanding the case to determine whether the sentence was imposed as a result of the district court's erroneous consideration of the defendant's prior arrests not resulting in prosecution); *United States v. Jones*, 444 F.3d 430, 434 (5th Cir. 2006) (cannot depart based only on arrest, but error harmless).

treating it as such.<sup>151</sup> The Fifth Circuit reversed, holding that adjusting the offense level based on a hypothetical federal crime was an inappropriate mechanism for a departure based on the inadequacy of criminal history. Second, reliance on a police report—which the district court could not use under *Shepard* to define a prior offense as a “drug trafficking offense” —was an invalid ground for a §5K2.0 departure.<sup>152</sup>

## **B. DOWNWARD DEPARTURES (§4A1.3(B))**

A downward departure may be warranted where “reliable information indicates that the defendant’s criminal history category substantially over-represents the seriousness of the defendant’s criminal history or the likelihood that the defendant will commit other crimes.”<sup>153</sup>

### **1. Lower Limit**

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Departing below the lower limit of the applicable guideline range for Criminal History Category I is prohibited.<sup>154</sup>

### **2. Limitation for Career Offenders**

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A downward departure under §4A1.3 for a career offender may not exceed one criminal history category.<sup>155</sup>

### **3. Prohibitions for Certain Repeat Offenders**

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Downward departures for overrepresentation of criminal history are prohibited for defendants who are armed career criminals under §4B1.4 or who are repeat and dangerous sex offenders against minors within the meaning of §4B1.5.<sup>156</sup>

## **C. DEPARTURES: PROCEDURAL CONCERNS**

In considering an upward departure based on inadequacy of criminal history, the court is instructed to use “as a reference, the criminal history category applicable to defendants whose criminal history or likelihood to recidivate most closely resembles that

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<sup>151</sup> 581 F.3d 251, 255 (5th Cir. 2009).

<sup>152</sup> *Id.* at 255.

<sup>153</sup> USSG §4A1.3(b)(1); *see, e.g.*, United States v. Marin-Castano, 688 F.3d 899, 905 (7th Cir. 2012) (a sentencing court has authority to depart downward pursuant to §4A1.3(b)(1), but it is not required to do so).

<sup>154</sup> USSG §4A1.3(b)(2)(A).

<sup>155</sup> USSG §4A1.3(b)(3)(A).

<sup>156</sup> USSG §4A1.3(b)(2)(B).

of the defendant's.”<sup>157</sup> If a defendant is already at the highest criminal history category, the court should move “incrementally down the sentencing table to the next higher offense level in Criminal History Category VI until it finds a guideline range appropriate to the case.”<sup>158</sup> Courts have held that the sentencing court must consider adjacent categories, determine on the record whether each category is inadequate, and provide reasons for these findings.<sup>159</sup> The same findings should be made for downward departures.<sup>160</sup>

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<sup>157</sup> USSG §4A1.3(a)(4)(A).

<sup>158</sup> USSG §4A1.3(a)(4)(B); *see also* United States v. Pennington, 9 F.3d 1116, 1118–19 (5th Cir. 1993) (remanding sentence as district court erred by not following §4A1.3 recommended approach to determine an upward departure).

<sup>159</sup> *See, e.g.,* United States v. Lambert, 984 F.2d 658, 663–64 (5th Cir. 1993) (en banc) (a district court should consider each intermediate criminal history category before arriving at a sentence but if it finds it necessary to go beyond the guidelines, the court must give adequate reasons why the guideline calculation was inadequate and why the sentence imposed is appropriate); *see also* USSG §4A1.3(c)(1) (court shall specify in writing the “the specific reasons why the applicable criminal history category substantially under-represents the seriousness of the defendant’s criminal history or the likelihood that the defendant will commit other crimes.”).

<sup>160</sup> USSG §4A1.3(c)(2) (court shall specify in writing the “the specific reasons why the applicable criminal history category substantially over-represents the seriousness of the defendant’s criminal history or the likelihood that the defendant will commit other crimes.”).