

# The Death Row Unit: An Inside Look

By *Eddie Molina*



- As of the Summer 2019, capital punishment is legal in 29 states.
- In 2018, 25 people were executed and 42 people were sentenced to death
- As of April 2019, there are 45 women on Death Row
- When the death penalty was reinstated in 1976 by the US Supreme Court, 1,499 people have been executed (as of May 2019)
- As of April 2019, there are 2,673 people on death row

These statistics are no secret- it is all public information.

They are basic facts brought to you by Google. It is information any of you can acquire by simply pulling out your phone and typing in some key words and phrases in the search bar. It took me about 2 minutes.

But there is information out there regarding Death Row that is not easily accessible. Questions like “What’s it like working a Death Row Unit (DRU)” and “Do the correctional officers feel any emotion after an inmate is executed?”

I set out on a mission to find someone that could answer those questions. And with the power of social media, I was able to find that very person (thank you Mark Zuckerberg).

My contact, who wishes to remain anonymous, worked for the Delaware Department of Corrections. He spent over ten years in the DRU and was able to give Blue Magazine an inside

look into what it's like to work with DRU inmates. Some of answers were expected, others were shocking.

And Blue readers get to read it all here.

**Blue:** Where have you worked?

**Anonymous:** I have worked at two facilities, James T. Vaughn Correctional Center and the Howard R. Young Correctional Institution since I started with the Delaware Department of Corrections over 14 years ago. A large majority of that time was spent on the DRU.

**Blue:** How would you describe the inmates that were housed in the DRU?

**Anonymous:** In a word- nice. I've worked in many housing units, some inmates were aggressive, had bad attitudes, and were disrespectful. The inmates in the DRU were simply nice. In all the years I've worked with those inmates, I've never had any significant disciplinary issues. I think it's because they made peace with their situation, but who really knows. I had a job to do, be fair, firm and consistent and make sure they get what they're entitled to, nothing more, nothing less.

**Blue:** Have you ever looked into an inmate's crime to see why he was sentenced to death?

**Anonymous:** I made it a point *not* to look. Nothing good would come of it. If I knew the specifics of why an inmate was sentenced to death, it could change the way I see the inmate and change the way I treat them too.

**Blue:** Correctional Officers spend a lot of time in prisons so it is normal to build some rapport with inmates. Have you or any of your co-workers become emotional after an execution?

**Anonymous:** Absolutely. We are human. You can tell which officers were affected because they seem sad and upset. No one speaks about it publicly, they just keep to themselves and go about their day, but you can still tell.

**Blue:** Can inmates really order anything they want for their last meal or is that just Hollywood?

**Anonymous:** Yes, they can order anything they want. The most common orders were cheesesteaks, lobster and pizza.

**Blue:** Did they have to order from approved vendors nearby?

**Anonymous:** No. If an inmate wants a Pat's or Geno's Cheesesteak, the warden will make sure he gets it.

**Blue:** Does an inmate's demeanor, attitude or mentality change as his execution date gets closer?

**Anonymous:** Yes, they get friendlier. Perhaps it's because they are continuing to make peace with their situation. Or maybe it's their last attempt to earn our approval as if we had any control over their execution.

**Blue:** Are family members of the victims or family members of the inmate allowed to observe the execution?

**Anonymous:** Yes. Both the family of the victims and only the immediate family of the inmate are allowed to attend. They are all, however, kept in the same room.

**Blue:** Is there anything else you think our readers need to know?

**Anonymous:** It's nothing like you see on TV or the media. The DRU is mellow and low key, as long as officers are fair and firm, it's pretty uneventful.

Mr. Anonymous took his job and his responsibilities very serious. He is a true professional and is a testament to Correctional Officers everywhere.

This interview reminds us all what people are capable of, both good and bad. Remember that and always stay vigilant and most importantly, stay safe out there!

*About the writer: Eddie Molina is an OIF veteran and focuses on leadership. He voluntarily writes articles for the law enforcement, first responder and military community. For more information go to [www.eddiemolina.com](http://www.eddiemolina.com)*