

An exceptional sentence must be for a determinate term and cannot exceed the statutory maximum for the crime. An exceptional sentence cannot include a term less than a mandatory minimum term of confinement if one exists. RCW 9.94A.540 sets a mandatory minimum term of confinement for certain offenses. Per terms specified in RCW 9.94A.570, persistent offenders sentenced to life in prison are not eligible for exceptional sentences.

Pursuant to the United States Supreme Court, before a court is permitted to impose sentences above the standard range, “[o]ther than the fact of a prior conviction, any fact that increases the penalty for a crime beyond the prescribed statutory maximum must be submitted to a jury and proved beyond a reasonable doubt.” *Blakely v. Washington*, 542 U.S. 296, 124 S.Ct. 2531, 159 L.Ed.2d 403 (2004).

If an exceptional sentence is given, the sentencing court is required to set forth the reasons for the departure from the standard range (RCW 9.94A.535) or from the consecutive/concurrent policy (RCW 9.94A.589(1) and (2)) in written Findings of Fact and Conclusions of Law. Exceptional sentences may be appealed by the individual or by the state.

RCW 9.94A.535 provides a list of factors that the court may consider in deciding whether to impose an exceptional sentence.

Mitigating Circumstances for Exceptional Sentences

Mitigating circumstances justifying a sentence below the standard range can found in RCW 9.94A.535(1). The circumstances on this list are provided as examples only. It is not intended to be an exclusive list of reasons for a departure below the standard range.

Aggravating Circumstances for Exceptional Sentences

Unlike mitigating circumstances, an exceptional sentence that is aggravated must be based on one or more of the circumstances listed in the statute. The list is not illustrative.

The court may impose an aggravated exceptional sentence *without* a finding of fact by a jury if the defendant and state both stipulate that justice is best served by an exceptional sentence and the court agrees that the stipulation is in the interest of justice and consistent with the Sentencing Reform Act under RCW 9.94A.535(2).

The court may also impose an exceptional sentence above the standard range if the procedures specified in RCW 9.94A.537 are followed and a jury makes findings of fact supporting any of the aggravating circumstances found in RCW 9.94A.535(3).

CONSECUTIVE AND CONCURRENT SENTENCES

RCW 9.94A.589 sets forth the rules regarding consecutive and concurrent sentences. Generally, sentences for multiple offenses set at one sentencing hearing are served concurrently unless there are two or more separate serious violent offenses, driving under the influence offenses, or weapon offenses. In those cases, the sentences are served consecutively, unless an exceptional sentence is entered (RCW 9.94A.589(1)(a-c)). The exceptions to this general rule are as follows:

Offenses that Constitute Same Criminal Conduct

If the court enters a finding that some or all of the current offenses required the same criminal intent, were committed at the same time and place, and involved the same victim, the offenses are treated as one offense (RCW 9.94A.589(1)(a)). A departure from this rule requires an exceptional sentence (RCW 9.94A.535).

Multiple Serious Violent Offenses

In the case of two or more serious violent offenses arising from separate and distinct criminal conduct, the sentences for these serious violent offenses are served consecutively to each other and concurrently with any other sentences imposed for current offenses (RCW 9.94A.589(1)(b)). A departure from this rule requires an exceptional sentence (RCW 9.94A.535).

Certain Firearm-Related Offenses

In the case of sentences that include Unlawful Possession of a Firearm in the First or Second Degree *and* one or both of the crimes of Theft of a Firearm or Possession of a Stolen Firearm, the sentences for these crimes are served consecutively for each conviction of the felony crimes listed and for each firearm unlawfully possessed¹². (RCW 9.94A.589(1)(c)). A departure from this rule requires an exceptional sentence. (RCW 9.94A.535).

Felony Driving while under the Influence (DUI) /Felony Actual Physical Control of a Vehicle while under the Influence

All sentences imposed under RCW 46.61.502(6), RCW 46.61.504(6) and RCW 46.61.5055(4) shall be served consecutively to any sentences imposed under RCW 46.20.740 and RCW 46.20.750 (RCW 9.94A.589(1)(d)). Additionally, under RCW 46.20.740 and RCW 46.20.750, any sentences imposed under RCW 46.20.740 and RCW 46.20.750 shall be served consecutively to each other, as well as consecutively to RCW 46.61.502(6), RCW 46.61.504(6), or RCW 46.61.5055(4).

Under RCW 46.20.750, any sentences imposed under RCW 46.20.750 shall be served consecutively with any sentence imposed under RCW 46.61.520(1)(a) or RCW 46.61.522(1)(b). However, this is not codified under RCW 9.94A.589.

Enhancements

For sentences involving the following enhancements, the enhancement portion of the sentence is served consecutively to all other sentencing provisions:

- Firearm or other deadly weapon enhancements for offenses committed after July 23, 1995 (RCW 9.94A.533(3) and (4)).
- Impaired driving enhancements (RCW 9.94A.533(7) and (13)).
- Sexual motivation enhancement for offenses committed on or after July 1, 2006 (RCW 9.94A.533(8)).

Felony Committed while under Sentence for Another Felony

Whenever a current offense is committed while the person is under sentence for a previous felony and the person was also sentenced for another term of imprisonment,

¹² Part of Initiative 159. Effective for offenses committed after July 23, 1995 (RCW 9.41.040(6)).

the latter term may not begin until expiration of all prior terms (RCW 9.94A.589(2)). A departure from this rule requires an exceptional sentence (RCW 9.94A.535).

Felonies Committed while under Sentence for Another Felony

This rule applies when individuals face multiple charges or have multiple convictions from different jurisdictions. Subject to the above policies, whenever a person is sentenced under a felony that was committed while the person was *not* under sentence for a felony, the sentence runs concurrently with felony sentences previously imposed by any court in this or another state or by a federal court, unless the court pronouncing the subsequent sentence expressly orders that they be served consecutively (RCW 9.94A.589(3)).

Probation Revocation

Whenever any person granted probation under RCW 9.95.210 or RCW 9.92.060, or both, has a probationary sentence revoked and a prison sentence imposed, this sentence runs consecutively to any sentence imposed, unless the court pronouncing the subsequent sentence expressly orders that they be served concurrently (RCW 9.94A.589(4)). This rule applies when a pre-SRA case probation is revoked and he or she is also sentenced on a conviction for a crime committed after June 30, 1984, the inception date of the SRA.

Serving Total Confinement with Consecutive Sentences

In the case of consecutive sentences, all periods of total confinement must be served before any periods of partial confinement, community service, community supervision or any other requirement or condition of a sentence (RCW 9.94A.589(5)). This rule applies to individuals who have not completed their sentence requirements from a previous conviction and are sentenced to total confinement on a new offense. A departure from this rule requires an exceptional sentence (RCW 9.94A.535).

LIMITS ON EARNED RELEASE

RCW 9.94A.729 provides that a person's sentence may be reduced by "earned release time." This time is earned through good behavior and good performance, as determined by the correctional agency that has jurisdiction over the individual. A person can be credited for "earned release time" for time served on a sentence and during pre-sentence incarceration.

Earned release time of up to 50% for certain non-violent, non-sex offenses was effective July 1, 2003 and applied to individuals convicted prior to July 2, 2010.

Earned release time of up to 15% is allowed for an offense categorized as a serious violent or Class A sex offense committed on or before July 1, 1990 and before July 1, 2003.

Earned release time of up to 10% is allowed for an offense categorized as a serious violent or Class A sex offense committed on or after July 1, 1990.

For sentences pursuant to RCW 10.95.030(3) or RCW 10.95.035, the time served during the minimum term of confinement imposed by the court is not eligible for earned release time; for any remaining portion of the sentence served, the aggregate earned release time may not exceed 10% of the sentence.