

# BOOK REVIEW

## Alan Ellis' Federal Prison Guidebook

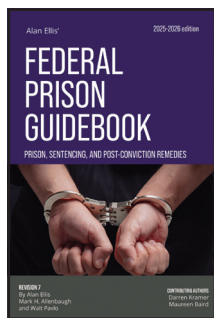
Prison, Sentencing, and Post-Conviction Remedies

2025-2026 Edition

By Alan Ellis, Mark H. Allenbaugh, and Walt Pavlo

James Publishing (2025)

Reviewed by Deborah J. Blum



In our line of work as criminal defense attorneys and legal practitioners, the value of a guidebook that should be considered the essential, go-to reference cannot be overstated. *Alan*

*Ellis' Federal Prison Guidebook* is one such reference. Not only does it outline what federal judges want, but they too rely on it — it is that authoritative.

With over 50 years of experience as not only an attorney but also the attorney for Federal Bureau of Prisons and post-conviction matters, Alan Ellis, a past president of NACDL, lays out, in succinct terms, the ABCs of federal sentencing and everything that follows. In terms of sentencing, the guidebook is a primer on how to optimize the possibility of receiving a below-Guidelines sentence and considerations to account for based on clients' unique circumstances. He quotes and cites the ultimate sentencing sources — members of the judiciary, many of whom he has appeared in front of and interviewed on his groundbreaking *Law 360: "Views from the Bench"* series — and his co-author, Mark Allenbaugh, a former Staff Attorney for

the U.S. Sentencing Commission. The rest of it provides intel that is often overlooked and can make or break the client's period of incarceration. Drawing on the vast knowledge of former Bureau of Prison insiders, the book covers in-depth topics such as how to influence prison placement, how to obtain medical designation and care, and institution-specific programming. Alan Ellis details direct appeal and 28. U.S.C. § 2255 options and the various pathways to early release, including RDAP, the First Step Act, Halfway House, and Home Confinement. He also walks people sentenced to a term of imprisonment (88% of federal criminal defendants) through the experience of being placed in a prison and explains what we can do to advocate for them.

*Alan Ellis' Federal Prison Guidebook* reminds us that advocacy does not stop at sentencing. It is easily digestible with a great breadth of indispensable information. Individuals with an investment in the best interests of their loved ones and pre- and post-conviction federal criminal clients should pick up this book right away. The guidebook, which is approximately 1,000 pages long, contains updated information that is often hard to find elsewhere. It is a no-nonsense, reliable point-finder best left on the desk rather than the shelf. ■

### About the Reviewer

Deborah J. Blum is a criminal defense attorney based in New York City.

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