

## Chapter HSS 310

## COMPLAINT PROCEDURES IN ADULT CORRECTIONAL INSTITUTIONS

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Note: Most of the sections in this chapter have explanatory material relating to the text of the rule. This material can be found in the appendix following HSS 310.14.

**HSS 310.01 Purpose.** (1) The policy of the division of corrections is to afford inmates in adult institutions a process by which grievances may be expeditiously raised, investigated, and decided. If the decision requires a change in administrative practice, the change shall be implemented.

(2) The objectives of the inmate complaint review system are:

(a) To allow inmates to raise, in an orderly fashion, questions regarding rules, living conditions, and staff actions affecting institution living;

(b) To encourage communication between inmates and staff;

(c) To develop inmates' sense of involvement in and respect for the correctional process;

(d) To explain correctional policy to inmates and staff;

(e) To afford inmates and staff the opportunity to review correctional policy and gain further insight into the correctional system;

(f) To correct any errors and deficiencies in correctional policy through questioning and review; and

(g) To allow inmates to raise civil rights grievances.

History: Cr. Register, April, 1981, No. 304, eff. 5-1-81; am. (2) (e) and (f), cr. (2) (g), Register, March, 1987, No. 375, eff. 4-1-87.

**HSS 310.015 Applicability.** Pursuant to authority vested in the department of health and social services under s. 227.11 (2), Stats., the department adopts this chapter which applies to the department, the division of corrections, and all adult inmates in its legal custody. It interprets s. 46.03, Stats.

History: Cr. Register, April, 1981, No. 304, eff. 5-1-81; correction made under s. 13.93 (2m) (b) 7, Stats., Register, March 1987.

**HSS 310.02 Definitions.** In this chapter:

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(1) "AA/CRC officer" or "affirmative action/civil rights compliance officer" means the person in the division designated by the administrator to monitor and aid in the investigation and resolution of civil rights complaints.

(2) "Administrator" means the administrator of the department's division of corrections, or his or her designee.

(3) "Calendar days" means all days including Saturdays, Sundays, and legal holidays.

(4) "CCE" or "corrections complaint examiner" means the person outside the division designated to investigate complaints appealed to the administrator.

(5) "Civil rights grievance" means any complaint relating to an incident affecting the delivery of services to inmates in which it appears an inmate has been discriminated against on the basis of race, creed, ethnicity, national origin, sex, handicap, age, religion, color, ancestry, sexual orientation, marital status, or arrest or conviction record.

(6) "Department" means the Wisconsin department of health and social services.

(7) "Director" means the director of the bureau of adult institutions in the department's division of corrections.

(8) "ICI" or "inmate complaint investigator" means the person at each adult correctional institution designated to investigate complaints filed by inmates.

(9) "ICRS" or "inmate complaint review system" means the process by which complaints filed by inmates of adult correctional institutions are investigated and resolved.

(10) "Secretary" means the head of the department, or that person's designee.

(11) "Superintendent" means the superintendent of the institution at which the complaint was filed, or that person's designee.

(12) "Working days" means all days except Saturdays, Sundays, and legal holidays.

History: Cr. Register, April, 1981, No. 304, eff. 5-1-81; r. and recr. Register, March, 1987, No. 375, eff. 4-1-87.

**HSS 310.025 Organization of inmate complaint review system.** The following steps outline the procedure for raising and resolving a grievance:

(1) To use the complaint system, an inmate files a complaint with the inmate complaint investigator (ICI) under s. HSS 310.05.

(2) The ICI then:

(a) Investigates the complaint under s. HSS 310.07;

(b) Attempts to resolve the complaint under s. HSS 310.07 (5); and

(c) Recommends a decision to the superintendent under s. HSS 310.07 (3).

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(3) The superintendent, after studying the ICI's report, renders a decision under s. HSS 310.08.

(4) An inmate may appeal an adverse decision to the corrections complaint examiner (CCE) under s. HSS 310.09 (1).

(5) The corrections complaint examiner then investigates and makes a recommendation to the administrator under s. HSS 310.09 (10).

(6) The administrator, under s. HSS 310.10, may:

- (a) Adopt the recommendation;
- (b) Adopt the recommendation with modifications; or
- (c) Reject the recommendation.

(7) The inmate can appeal the administrator's decision under s. HSS 310.11 to the secretary who may:

- (a) Affirm the decision;
- (b) Reject the decision and enter a new decision; or
- (c) Take no action, thereby affirming the administrator's decision.

(8) If an affirmed complaint is not implemented, the inmate may inform the administrator who shall:

- (a) Investigate; and
- (b) Ensure implementation.

History: Cr. Register, April, 1981, No. 304, eff. 5-1-81.

**HSS 310.03 Inmate complaint review system.** (1) To effectuate the purpose and objectives of HSS 310.01, the division shall maintain an inmate complaint review system (ICRS) in the adult correctional institutions.

(2) Each superintendent shall appoint an inmate complaint investigator (ICI) to implement the inmate complaint review system. In some institutions the superintendent may designate an employe to function as ICI in addition to other duties. Complaint investigation shall be the primary responsibility of this person.

(3) The ICI shall be provided with office space and clerical support required to implement the ICRS.

(4) In investigating a complaint, the ICI shall have access to staff, inmates, and any institution or division records pertaining to that investigation not otherwise protected by rule or statute.

(5) When the ICI is absent from the institution more than 2 working days, the superintendent shall designate a staff member to act as ICI.

History: Cr. Register, April, 1981, No. 304, eff. 5-1-81.

**HSS 310.04 Scope of complaint review system.** (1) The inmate complaint review system (ICRS) may be used by an inmate acting individually or by a group of inmates acting collectively.

(2) The ICRS may be used to seek a change of any institutional policy or practice except:

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(a) A finding of guilt or a penalty imposed by an adjustment committee or a disciplinary hearing officer as the result of a disciplinary hearing under ch. HSS 303, except that the ICRS may be used to challenge procedural errors in accordance with sub. (3);

(b) A program review committee's decision;

(c) A decision of the parole board acting in any capacity;

(d) The denial of a request for an authorized leave as provided in ch. HSS 326; or

(e) A decision on a challenge to an inmate record.

(3) The ICRS may be used to challenge the procedure used by the adjustment committee or hearing officer, by a program review committee, or by any decisionmaker acting on a request for authorized leave. If a complaint challenging the procedure used by the adjustment committee or hearing officer is affirmed, the decisionmaker shall:

1. Affirm the adjustment committee's or hearing officer's decision but reduce the sentence in type or quality;

2. Reverse the adjustment committee's or hearing officer's decision. In this case, all records of the decision shall be removed from all offender-based files. Records may be kept for statistical purposes only; or

3. Return the case to the adjustment committee or hearing officer for further consideration.

(4) Complaints regarding inmate health care can be filed in the ICRS, except that the administrator shall send the ICI's recommendation to the director of the bureau of institution health services in the division of health under s. HSS 310.10; on appeal, the CCE's recommendation shall be sent to the administrator of the division of health. An adverse decision may be appealed to the secretary in accordance with s. HSS 310.11.

(5) Civil rights complaints may be filed in the ICRS in accordance with the procedures set forth in this chapter. The ICI at the institution level and CCE at the appeals level may request assistance from the division's affirmative action/civil rights compliance officer to investigate or resolve a civil rights complaint.

History: Cr. Register, April, 1981, No. 304, eff. 5-1-81; am. (2) (a) and (b) and (3), cr. (5), Register, March, 1987, No. 375, eff. 4-1-87.

**HSS 310.05 Filing of complaints.** (1) A complaint, whether filed by an individual or a group of inmates, shall be written on forms supplied for that purpose and shall be signed by the inmate or by all members of the group filing the complaint.

(2) A complaint shall be filed within 14 calendar days after the occurrence giving rise to the complaint, except that the inmate complaint investigator (ICI) may accept a late complaint for cause.

(3) If an inmate is unable to write a complaint, the ICI shall reduce the complaint to writing and shall read it to the inmate. When the inmate is satisfied with the complaint, the inmate should sign it. An inmate can also receive assistance from another inmate in preparing a complaint.

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(4) The institution shall provide a supply of complaint forms readily available to inmates.

(5) A signed complaint may be filed by depositing it in a locked box in the living unit or by placing it in a sealed envelope marked for delivery to the office of the ICI.

(6) An inmate may file any number of complaints. However, the ICI shall exercise discretion in determining the order in which subsequent complaints from an inmate will be processed within the time limits of this section and in keeping with priorities set by s. HSS 310.07 (3).

History: Cr. Register, April, 1981, No. 304, eff. 5-1-81; am. (2), Register, March 1987, No. 375, eff. 4-1-87.

**HSS 310.06 Group complaints.** (1) Except as noted in this section, group complaints are processed in the same way as individual complaints.

(2) Inmates having a complaint in common may file as a group by using one complaint form and affixing the signatures of all complainants to the form. Alternatively, each may file individually but ask that the complaints be considered together. In either event, the group shall designate a spokesperson or, if none is designated, the first name signed on the first complaint filed shall be deemed spokesperson.

(3) If more than one complaint is filed on the same subject, the inmate complaint investigator (ICI) or the corrections complaint examiner (CCE) can elect to treat the complaints as a group complaint, but each complainant shall be furnished with notices and acknowledgments of receipt of appeals as if they were individual complaints.

(4) The ICI shall determine if the complaint is in fact a common complaint. If the ICI determines that the complainants do not share a common complaint, the reasons for that determination shall be sent in writing to the complainants.

(5) The ICI shall determine if decisions or acknowledgments shall be communicated individually to all parties to a group complaint or, if individual notice is administratively infeasible, may elect to post decisions or acknowledgments of receipt of appeals in a place accessible to the group.

(6) Group complaints filed in accordance with this section shall not be deemed a group petition within the meaning of s. HSS 303.20 and shall not subject the complainants to discipline under that section.

History: Cr. Register, April, 1981, No. 304, eff. 5-1-81.

**HSS 310.07 Processing complaints at the institution level.** (1) Unless the inmate complaint investigator (ICI) is absent, at least once each working day the ICI shall collect all complaints deposited in any complaint box in the institution. The superintendent shall proceed under s. HSS 310.03 (5) in the event of an absence of the ICI for longer than 2 working days. Only the ICI shall have access to the complaint boxes, which shall be provided with locks.

(2) Each complaint shall be assigned a file number for purposes of identification, and the date of receipt shall be noted. Each complaint shall be reviewed and acknowledged in writing by the ICI within 3 calendar days of the date of receipt. Complaints dealing with health or personal safety shall be given priority.

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(3) The ICI shall employ discretion in deciding the investigatory method best suited to expeditiously determine the facts, including personal interviews, telephone calls, and document and correspondence review. The ICI shall forward a report and recommendation to the superintendent within 15 calendar days from the date of acknowledgment for decision in accordance with s. HSS 310.08. The complainant may waive the time limits for up to an additional 30 calendar days to allow completion of an investigation. The report shall include those items required by subs. (5) and (6), when applicable. The inmate may waive time limits if the additional time will result in resolution of the complaint.

(4) Staff must respond in writing, if requested, to an inquiry by an ICI investigating a complaint.

(5) The ICI shall attempt to informally resolve the complaint at the institution level. If resolution attempts are successful, the ICI shall record the results in writing and have the complainant sign the report indicating the complainant's acceptance of the resolution. This resolution shall then be forwarded to the superintendent for a decision under s. HSS 310.08.

(6) If an inmate is transferred to another institution after a complaint is filed but before a superintendent renders a decision, the ICI shall determine if the complaint is moot because of the transfer and, if so, shall notify the inmate. If the issue still must be decided, the ICI at the institution where the complaint originated shall investigate and make a recommendation to the superintendent.

(7) If an inmate is transferred after an incident but before filing a complaint, the inmate shall file the complaint at the receiving institution. The ICI there shall send the complaint to the ICI at the transferring institution for investigation and decision.

(8) In any event, the ICI shall note the persons interviewed and the documents or records relied on in reaching a decision.

History: Cr. Register, April, 1981, No. 304, eff. 5-1-81; am. (2) and (3), Register, March, 1987, No. 375, eff. 4-1-87.

**HSS 310.08 Superintendent's decision.** (1) Within 5 calendar days after receipt of the ICI's report, the superintendent shall render a written decision, including the reasons for the decision. If the superintendent accepts the ICI's recommendation, indication of acceptance shall be sufficient. The superintendent's decision and the ICI's report shall be delivered to the complainant or to the designated spokesperson in a group complaint as provided in s. HSS 310.06 (4).

(2) If the complainant does not receive the superintendent's decision within 23 calendar days of the ICI's receipt of the complaint, the complaint shall be considered denied and may be appealed immediately.

History: Cr. Register, April, 1981, No. 304, eff. 5-1-81; am. Register, March, 1987, No. 375, eff. 4-1-87.

**HSS 310.09 Review by corrections complaint examiner.** (1) A complainant affected by a superintendent's decision may, within 5 calendar days after receipt of the decision, appeal that decision by filing a written request for review with the corrections complaint examiner (CCE).

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(2) Appeals shall be sent to the CCE in a sealed envelope that division employes may not open or inspect.

(3) The CCE may accept for review an appeal filed later than 5 calendar days after receipt of the decision if the elapsed time has not made it difficult or impossible to investigate the complaint.

(4) The CCE shall, within 5 calendar days after receiving an appeal, review and acknowledge receipt of the appeal. Appeals dealing with health and personal safety shall be given priority attention. Within 5 calendar days of a request by the CCE, the inmate complaint investigator shall provide the CCE with copies of the complaint, the ICI's investigation report and the superintendent's decision.

(5) The CCE may use any appropriate investigatory method necessary to make a recommendation to the administrator. The CCE shall have full access to inmates, staff, physical plant, and division records. If an appeal necessitates resolution of disputed issues of fact, the CCE may require sworn statements from the principals.

(6) The CCE shall be treated as a division employe for purposes of access to records.

(7) If issues are extremely complex and many witnesses are involved, and the CCE feels other investigatory methods are inadequate, the CCE may order an evidentiary hearing. In that event, the CCE shall:

(a) Give adequate and timely notice of the hearing to the inmate and any person whose presence is necessary at the hearing;

(b) Arrange for production of witnesses;

(c) Provide for representation for parties when necessary;

(d) Personally preside at the hearing; and

(e) Determine the method of proceeding and the rules of evidence to be used during the hearing.

(8) Transcription of the proceedings shall be at the discretion of the CCE.

(9) If a hearing is held, the time limits for a recommendation may be extended by written agreement of the complainant and the superintendent.

(10) Unless extended for cause and upon notice, the CCE shall recommend a decision to the administrator within 37 calendar days of receipt of the complaint. Should the CCE fail to make a recommendation within the prescribed time, the superintendent's decision shall be affirmed. The inmate shall be notified of all decisions.

(11) A complainant may waive time limits if doing so may result in a favorable decision by the administrator rather than an affirmation of the superintendent's decision under sub. (10).

History: Cr. Register, April, 1981, No. 304, eff. 5-1-81; am. (1), (3), (4) and (10), Register, March, 1987, No. 375, eff. 4-1-87.

**HSS 310.10 Division administrator's decision.** (1) The corrections complaint examiner's (CCE's) written recommendation, along with a copy of the institution complaint file, shall be delivered to the division admin-

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istrator who shall make a decision based on the record within 5 calendar days following receipt of the recommendation. The administrator may take an additional 5 calendar days to make that decision if there is cause and the administrator notifies all interested parties.

(2) The administrator may:

(a) Accept the recommendation of the CCE and adopt it as the decision;

(b) Adopt the recommendation of the CCE with modifications; or

(c) Reject the recommendation of the CCE and decide.

(3) If no written decision is made by the administrator within the time limit, the findings and recommendation of the CCE shall be deemed to be the administrator's decision, and the administrator shall promptly advise the parties concerned.

History: Cr. Register, April, 1981, No. 304, eff. 5-1-81; am. Register, March, 1987, No. 375, eff. 4-1-87.

**HSS 310.11 Departmental review.** (1) Any inmate whose appeal to the administrator was denied may, within 5 calendar days after receipt of the decision, appeal the decision to the secretary.

(2) An appeal filed later than 5 calendar days after receipt of the administrator's decision may be accepted by the secretary at his or her discretion.

(3) A completed "Request for Departmental Review" form shall be sent to the secretary in a sealed envelope. The secretary shall acknowledge in writing the receipt of the appeal. The administrator, upon request, shall forward the complete complaint file to the secretary.

(4) The secretary shall examine the complete complaint file and may affirm, reverse, or modify the administrator's decision or may return the file to the administrator for additional proceedings, specifying the investigation or action desired.

(5) (a) If the complaint includes a challenge to a policy, practice, or rule, the secretary may consider additional written or oral information from any person regarding the need or purpose of any policy or practice or rule. The secretary may also consider any publications, books, or other documents considered relevant to the subject of the challenge.

(b) The secretary shall determine the weight to be given to the file, testimony, or other written material and shall summarize briefly in the written decision the material examined and relied on.

(6) Within 10 calendar days after receipt of the complaint file, the secretary shall determine all issues raised in the appeal and shall set forth in writing his or her decision and the reasons for the decision. If the secretary's decision is to affirm the decision of the administrator, it shall be sufficient to indicate affirmance and the reason. If the secretary fails to reach a decision within the allotted time, the decision of the administrator shall stand and the secretary shall so notify the complainant. If the issue raised in the complaint can best be dealt with through revising the administrative rules, the secretary may direct the administrator to undertake rulemaking in accordance with s. HSS 310.12 (4). The secre-

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tary's decision shall be delivered promptly to all affected persons, including the person requesting the review, the administrator and the corrections complaint examiner.

History: Cr. Register, April, 1981, No. 304, eff. 5-1-81; am. (1), (2) and (6), Register, March, 1987, No. 375, eff. 4-1-87.

**HSS 310.12 Implementation of affirmed complaint.** (1) Changes in an institution program or operation affecting the general inmate population and resulting from an affirmed complaint shall be made known through widely distributed written notice to inmates within 14 calendar days after issuance of the decision.

(2) Within 30 calendar days after issuance of the administrator's decision, the director of the bureau of adult institutions shall notify all affected parties of decisions that affect more than one institution.

(3) If an affirmed complaint has not been implemented at any level within 30 calendar days after a decision to affirm, the complainant may directly inform the administrator by mail of the failure to implement the decision. The administrator shall investigate and take all steps necessary to ensure implementation.

(4) If a decision on a complaint requires a change in an administrative rule, the decisionmaker shall initiate rulemaking.

History: Cr. Register, April, 1981, No. 304, eff. 5-1-81; am. Register, March, 1987, No. 375, eff. 4-1-87.

**HSS 310.13 Confidentiality.** (1) Except as otherwise provided in this section, complaints filed with the inmate complaint review system (ICRS) shall be confidential. Persons working in the ICRS shall respect the confidential nature of the work. The identity of complainants and the nature of the complaint shall be revealed only to the extent necessary for thorough investigation and implementation of the remedy.

(2) Confidentiality of complaints may be waived by the superintendent if the security of the institution, staff or inmates is involved.

(3) A copy of material relating to an inmate's written complaint may not be filed in any case file, nor may any notations regarding a complaint be made in those files.

(4) A breach of confidentiality in the process may itself be the subject of a complaint. This type of complaint shall be filed directly with the CCE.

(5) A complainant may make public any aspect of a complaint at any time. If the complaint contains a false statement meeting the requirements of s. HSS 303.271, making that false statement public constitutes the offense of lying about staff.

(6) No sanction may be applied against an inmate for filing a complaint.

(7) Subsections (3), (4) and (6) do not apply if a conduct report based on an inmate's complaint is filed under s. HSS 303.271.

History: Cr. Register, April, 1981, No. 304, eff. 5-1-81; am. Register, April, 1985, No. 352, eff. 5-1-85.

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**HSS 310.14 Reports.** (1) The inmate complaint investigator (ICI) shall submit quarterly reports to the administrator to indicate the number and type of complaints processed and the disposition of the complaints.

(2) The CCE shall file an annual report with the attorney general, the secretary, and the administrator. This report shall include:

(a) The number and type of complaints processed at the CCE level of the ICRS;

(b) The number of complaints resolved by mediation at the CCE level;

(c) The number of complaints recommended for dismissal; and

(d) The number of complaints recommended for acceptance.

(3) The CCE may include in its reports other information or make recommendations concerning the ICRS.

History: Cr. Register, April, 1981, No. 304, eff. 5-1-81; am. Register, March, 1987, No. 375, eff. 4-1-87.

## APPENDIX

Note: HSS 310.01. HSS 310.01 states the purpose of the inmate complaint review system and the commitment of the division to the system.

Subsection (2) lists the objectives of the inmate complaint review system. This structured avenue of communication and involvement will benefit inmates, staff, and the correctional process. Issues and policies that need to be reexamined periodically will be brought to the attention of the administration, and a forum is provided for resolution of questions without prolonged debate.

Correctional authorities and many commentators have recognized the desirability of providing a means of airing legitimate grievances arising in prisons.

Everyone benefits from a fair system. For inmates, the benefits include the opportunity to air complaints in an orderly way and to have them resolved quickly after a careful investigation. Sometimes the result will simply be an explanation or clarification of policy. This itself is of great importance, even if the decision is contrary to the complainant's wishes. At other times, the complaint may reveal deficiency in practice or policy, which can be corrected.

The right to a lawsuit to resolve legitimate grievances is not as meaningful if they could be resolved administratively. A fair system encourages one to respect and willingly live within norms, even if one would prefer that rules be different. Furthermore, a system encouraging involvement is likely to eliminate the use of unacceptable and destructive methods for raising grievances.

Staff and the public benefit as well. No one has an interest in maintaining a system that is rigid and unresponsive to new ideas; that is not understood and respected; or that encourages unacceptable behavior. Everyone does have an interest in affording both staff and inmates the opportunity to reflect on correctional policy, gain insight into it, and suggest improvement.

Finally, no proper interest is served by flooding the courts with grievances that could be resolved administratively. Although the courts have not given the division power to decide what must be done before a lawsuit can be commenced, the federal district court for the eastern district of Wisconsin held that an inmate must exhaust all state administrative procedures before seeking relief under 42 U.S.C. section 1983, thus approving the complaint review system. *McKeeter v. Israel*, 476 F. Supp. 1370 (E.D. Wis. 1979).

Experience with the Wisconsin complaint system has shown that most complaints relate to personal property, the application of rules, and disagreements with staff. Other complaints include issues such as religion, visiting, correspondence, and publications. These substantive issues are, of course, of great concern to inmates, staff, and the public. Although most of these grievances relate to matters which appear minor to people unfamiliar with the correctional system, many are critical to inmates because of the profound personal effect. For example, lost personal property is of great importance to inmates. While not of constitutional dimension, it frequently affects inmates more than issues to which great importance is attached by the Constitution or courts. For a more detailed description of the types of grievances, see "Resident Complaint Review System Annual Report," report of the Correctional Complaint Examiner for 1978.

See also: American Bar Association's *Tentative Draft of Standards Relating to the Legal Status of Prisoners* (1977) (hereinafter "ABA"), Commentary, pp. 569-571, standard 8.6 and commentary, pp. 578-582; National Advisory Commission on Criminal Justice Standards and Goals, *Corrections* (1973) (hereinafter "National Advisory Commission"), standard 2.14 and commentary, pp. 56-57; and American Correctional Association's *Manual of Standards for Adult Correctional Institutions* (1977) (hereinafter "ACA"), standard 4301.

Note: HSS 310.02. HSS 310.02 defines the terms used in this chapter. The use of "designee" in subs. (1), (10) and (11) is acknowledgement that, due to the workload at the administrative levels, a staff member may be directed to draft responses to appeals.

Note: HSS 310.03. HSS 303.03 (2) establishes the position of inmate complaint investigator. Although this position title is not listed in the state classified (civil) service, at the major institutions the position is filled from a list of eligible candidates following a competitive qualifying process. The selected person is expected to devote primary attention to the functions of investigating complaints and recommending resolutions.

In some institutions, the superintendent may designate a staff member as the ICI. In any case, the ICI represents the superintendent and reports directly to the superintendent. The inmate complaint investigator does not occupy an easy position. In carrying out the duties,

the ICI must continually serve as liaison between inmates and staff, dealing fairly with both groups if the system is to enjoy any degree of integrity. Mature judgment is required, as is a thorough knowledge of the operation of the institution.

Subsection (3) ensures that the ICI is supplied with resources adequate to carry out the duties. To adequately investigate complaints, the ICI must be able to interview appropriate staff and review pertinent records and documents. This principle is stated in sub. (4). Some records and personnel files, for example, are protected by other rules and would not be included in the ICI's investigation.

Because timeliness is important in handling complaints, the superintendent is authorized to designate an acting ICI in the absence of the appointed investigator.

**Note:** HSS 310.01. This section establishes the scope and limits of the inmate complaint review system, including both individual and group complaints.

The scope of the grievance system is wide. It can be used to seek change of any institutional policy or practice not listed in sub. (2). Of course, some complaints may lead to a recommendation for change in administrative rules. The problem is whether the issue can be resolved in the ICRS or must result in a recommendation that a rule be changed and in many cases will result in a change in current practice. Of course, the application of a rule may be challenged in the ICRS.

There are 3 principal reasons for the exceptions provided in sub. (2). First, procedures for review of some decisions are provided in other sections of the administrative rules. This is true of disciplinary, program review, and furlough decisions. Second, some matters, such as parole, are not within the authority of corrections. Finally, the nature of the issue may make investigation difficult or may require expertise that is beyond the ICI and the GCE.

The processes by which these decisions are made, except parole, are within the scope of the system. HSS 310.04 is substantially in agreement with *American Bar Association*, standard 8.6 (b), and *American Correctional Association*, standard 4301.

Because health care service is provided by the division of health, appeal of a health-related complaint is referred to that division by the administrator.

**Note:** HSS 310.05. HSS 310.05 sets out the procedure by which a complaint can be filed. It is intended to make filing as easy as possible. No one should be excluded from legitimate use of the system because he or she does not have complaint forms or is unable to write.

Since the ICI may require an inmate to attempt to resolve a complaint informally before filing, the aggrieved inmate should talk with staff involved to try to gain a greater understanding of the situation. An informal resolution of the complaint would meet all the objectives of s. HSS 310.01.

Subsection (2) underscores the importance of filing a complaint as soon as it is apparent that no other acceptable method of resolution is possible. The ICI is given discretion, however, to accept old complaints if he or she believes it is still possible to adequately determine the facts needed to make a recommendation. Promptness in filing a complaint is required to ensure a thorough investigation of the facts. This is especially true of complaints involving lost or damaged personal property. Recollections can dim or property can be altered or destroyed, making investigation difficult or impossible.

The number of complaints one person can file should not be limited, except that the ICRS may become overburdened because of multiple complaints from one individual. The ICI must have the discretion to set priorities in handling complaints. All complaints should be resolved promptly, however.

**Note:** HSS 310.06. Complaints arising from living and working conditions or the application of a rule to a segment of the institution population may be shared by a number of persons in contrast to a complaint that affects only one inmate. Accordingly, this section allows a group of inmates to join in a common complaint.

Occasionally, several similar or closely related complaints will be filed by individuals. Subsection (2) permits the ICI or GCE to consolidate them for investigation or decision, but those complaints will be treated as individual complaints for purposes of notices and acknowledgments.

Sometimes many inmates, almost the entire institution population, join in a complaint. Obviously, making copies and paying postage to send each signer a copy of related document would not be administratively feasible. The ICI must exercise discretion in how sub. (4) is applied.

Since the department is encouraging the use of the complaint system to deal with frustrations and irritations of institution life, prohibiting group complaints would be inappropriate. Subsection (5) makes this clear.

**Note: HSS 310.07.** HSS 310.07 establishes the procedure for processing complaints and authorizes priority handling of complaints dealing with health or personal safety. This reflects the importance attached to these matters.

Subsections (2), (3), and (5) substantially conform with *ABA*, standard 8.6 (a); *National Advisory Commission*, standards 2.14 (2) and (3); and *ACA*, standard 4301.

Informal resolution of a complaint is not only authorized, but also encouraged. The system is well served if a complaint can be resolved at this initial stage. Often a discussion between the complainant and the ICI will open communication channels. This can do much to remove misunderstandings and relieve the tensions from which the complaint developed. Experience with the complaint procedure in Wisconsin has shown that more than one third of the complaints filed are resolved informally. The resolutions are in writing to ensure both that the complainant agrees and that, if a similar complaint arises, the past resolution can be examined as a basis for settlement.

The complainant must have the option to waive time limits for a decision if doing so will result in resolution of the complaint. Because of the time required to investigate some complex complaints, unwaivable time limits would force denial of some complaints. This would not serve the system's purpose.

Because inmates are frequently transferred within the Wisconsin correctional system, subs. (6) and (7) provide a method for dealing with complaints arising just before or at the time of the transfer. A frequent subject of complaint has to do with personal property lost or damaged at transfer, and these complaints must be processed.

**Note: HSS 310.08.** This section requires the superintendent's written decision to be rendered within 23 calendar days of the date the complaint is filed. If the complaint system is to have any value as a method of resolving conflict, decisions must be rendered quickly. In a standard listing of institution grievance mechanisms in which important elements of such a mechanism were identified, one of the most important was timeliness. The speed with which a complaint is handled is often viewed by inmates as indicating the importance attached to it. For inmates who have nothing in more abundance than time, the element of time assumes great importance.

The importance of fixed time limits and a written response was further recognized by *National Advisory Commission*, standard 2.14 (4); *ACA*, standard 4301; and *ABA*, standard 8.6 (c).

**Note: HSS 310.09.** HSS 310.09 sets out the procedure for appealing a superintendent's adverse decision to the CCE. This section requires that appeals be filed within 5 calendar days, although the CCE may accept an appeal filed later and as a matter of practice usually does so. The appeal is sent directly to the CCE and is not subject to mail inspection at the institution. This exempt status is provided in s. HSS 309.02 (2).

Appeal to the CCE provides another element deemed essential to a valid complaint system, namely, a review by someone outside the correctional agency. The CCE is currently employed by the department of justice but assigned to function in the complaint process. This person has no other connection with the division of corrections.

The necessity of outside review is a feature of most prison grievance systems having any degree of inmate acceptance. This position is well stated in Krantz et al., *Model Rules and Regulations on Prisoner Rights and Responsibilities* (1973) p. 203.

Moreover, the uniqueness of the correctional system would seem to require the availability of external mechanisms to review complaints. It is believed that internal grievance procedures "are part of the system," and that where "recommended action" comes from prison officials, directly or indirectly connected with reviewing a complaint, peer group pressure or command influence may adversely affect a fair decision.

**Note: HSS 310.12.** Since the purpose of the complaint system is to air grievances and seek resolutions, decisions resulting in changes in program, policy, or rule interpretation that affect more than a few inmates, must be promptly implemented.

Throughout these rules the principle has been repeatedly set out that, to be enforceable or effective, rules and notices must be posted in places readily available to inmates and in a form the inmates can be reasonably expected to see. This principle is restated with respect to rules or policies altered by a complaint decision.

## HSS 310 Appendix

Formerly, if an affirmed complaint was not implemented, the complainant notified the CCE who undertook to secure compliance. Subsection (3) modifies this to state that the complainant may notify the administrator of failure to implement a decision. This is proper because the administrator, rather than the CCE, is in a position to ensure that a decision is implemented promptly. This is even more appropriate if the change results from the administrator's decision.

**Note: HSS 310.13.** If the ICRS is to have integrity and the confidence of the inmates, complaints entered must be treated confidentially and, with certain limited exceptions, no sanctions can result from use of the system. Because of the unique and complex relations existing between prison inmates and staff, friction and irritation almost inevitably will arise from time to time. The source of some of these feelings will be the application or misapplication of rules and discretion. The complaint system is an appropriate forum for resolving these issues, but because complaints often identify a staff member as the perceived perpetrator of some injustice, the complainant must be protected from retribution or penalty for legitimate use of the system. If use of the system routinely resulted in penalties or sanctions, the system would quickly be abandoned. The desirability of ensuring that no adverse action results from the filing of a grievance is recognized by National Advisory Commission, standard 2.14 (2) (b), and ACA, standard 4301.

The nature of some complaints is such that a meaningful investigation cannot be made without revealing the identity of the complainant, but this should be done only when necessary. Confidentiality can be waived if it can be shown that the security of the institution, staff, or inmates is involved.

This is not to say that inmates are free to make false statements about staff, knowing they are false and with the intent to harm the staff, especially if those false statements are made public. There have been malicious lies about staff corruption and sexual behavior made in the complaint system. This rule does not insulate inmates from disciplinary action for the illegitimate use, or rather abuse, of the complaint system.

Those inmates joining a group complaint should realize that, if a decision is posted as provided in HSS 310.06 (5), confidentiality cannot be maintained.

The ICI must use discretion in revealing only enough information about the nature of the complaint to allow for a thorough investigation.

The complainant is free to reveal any information about a complaint that he or she has filed. However, if an inmate makes a false accusation pursuant to s. HSS 303.271, revealing that false accusation to persons outside the complaint system may subject the inmate to disciplinary action.

**Note: HSS 310.14.** This section requires accurate uniform reports of complaints filed under the ICRS. The staff responsible for the ICRS and correctional programs can use the report's information to judge the impact of the complaint system and to secure some indication of problems creating frustrations that may inhibit effective programming. Quarterly reports are compiled by each ICI. Concerned persons may obtain copies from the CCE administrator.