

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; and

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

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

**HSS 310.015 Applicability.** Pursuant to authority vested in the department of health and social services under s. 227.014 (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.

**HSS 310.02 Definitions.** (1) "Administrator" means the administrator of the division of corrections or designee.

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(2) "Director" means the director of the bureau of adult institutions in the division of corrections.

(3) "Corrections complaint examiner" ("CCE") means the person outside the division designated to investigate complaints appealed to the administrator.

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

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

(6) "Secretary" means the secretary of the department of health and social services, or designee.

(7) "Superintendent" means the superintendent of the institution at which the complaint was filed, or designee.

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

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

**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 HSS 310.05.

(2) The ICI then:

(a) Investigates the complaint under HSS 310.07;

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

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

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

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

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

(6) The administrator, under 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 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 two 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:

(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;

(b) A program review committee's decision under ch. HSS 308 to place a person in administrative confinement;

(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 decision maker acting on a request for authorized leave.

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(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 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 HSS 310.11.

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

**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 days of the occurrence giving rise to the complaint, except that the inmate complaint investigator (ICI) can 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.

(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 HSS 310.07 (3).

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

**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 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 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 by the ICI by the end of the next working day. Complaints dealing with health or personal safety shall be given priority.

(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 10 working days for decision in accordance with HSS 310.08. The complainant may waive the time limits for up to an additional 10 working days to allow completion of an investigation. The report shall include those items required by HSS 310.07 (5) and (6). 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 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.

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(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.

**HSS 310.08 Superintendent's decision.** (1) Within 5 working days of 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 HSS 310.06 (4).

(2) If the complainant does not receive the superintendent's decision within 15 working days, the complaint shall be considered denied and can be appealed immediately.

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

**HSS 310.09 Review by corrections complaint examiner.** (1) A complainant affected by a superintendent's decision may, within 10 working days, appeal that decision by filing a written request for review with the corrections complaint examiner (CCE).

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

(3) The CCE may accept for review an appeal filed later than 10 working days after receipt of decision if the elapsed time has not made it difficult or impossible to investigate the complaint.

(4) The CCE shall, within 5 working days, review and acknowledge receipt of an appeal. Appeals dealing with health and personal safety shall be given priority attention. Within 5 working days of a request by the CCE, the inmate complaint investigator shall provide 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 22 working days. Should the CCE fail to make a recommendation within the prescribed time, the assumption shall be that the superintendent's decision is 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.

**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 administrator who shall make a decision based on the record within 10 working days. For cause and upon administrator's notice to all interested parties, an additional 10 working days shall be allowed.

(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.

**HSS 310.11 Departmental review.** (1) Any inmate whose appeal to the administrator was denied may, within 15 working days of receipt of the decision, appeal the decision to the secretary of the department.

(2) An appeal filed later than 15 working days of 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 15 working days of receipt of the complaint file, the secretary shall determine all issues raised in the appeal and shall set forth in writing the reasons for the decision. If the secretary affirms the decision of the administrator, it shall be sufficient to indicate affirmance and the reason.

If the secretary should fail 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 shall direct the administrator to undertake rulemaking in accordance with HSS 310.12 (4).

The secretary'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.

**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 within 10 working days of issuance of the decision.

(2) Within 22 working days of 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 22 working days of a decision to affirm, the complainant may directly inform the administrator by mail. 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 decision maker can initiate rulemaking.

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

**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.

**HSS 310.14 Reports.** (1) The corrections complaint examiner (CCE) shall prescribe record-keeping requirements for all persons working in the system.

(2) The inmate complaint investigator (ICI) shall submit quarterly reports to the CCE on forms provided by the CCE to indicate the number and type of complaints processed and the disposition of the complaints.

(3) 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 each level of the ICRS;

(b) The number of complaints resolved by mediation;

(c) The number of complaints dismissed; and

(d) The number of complaints accepted.

(4) The CCE may include other information or make recommendations concerning the ICRS.

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