

Chapter DOC 310

COMPLAINT PROCEDURES

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Note: Chapter HSS 310 was renumbered Chapter DOC 310 under s. 13.93 (2m) (b) 1, 2 and 7, Stats.

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 DOC 310.14.

DOC 310.01 Purpose. (1) The policy of the department 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; emerg. am. (1), eff. 1-1-90; am. (1), Register, May, 1990, No. 413, eff. 6-1-90.

DOC 310.015 Applicability. Pursuant to authority vested in the department of corrections under ss. 301.02, 301.03 (2) and 227.11 (2), Stats., the department adopts this chapter which applies to the department and all adult inmates in its legal custody. It interprets ss. 301.02 and 301.03 (2), 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; emerg. am. eff. 1-1-90; am. Register, May, 1990, No. 413, eff. 6-1-90.

DOC 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 department designated by the secretary to monitor and aid in the investigation and resolution of civil rights complaints.

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

(3) "CCE" or "corrections complaint examiner" means the person outside the department designated to investigate complaints appealed to the secretary.

(4) "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 or marital status.

(5) "Department" means the Wisconsin department of corrections.

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

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

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

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

(10) "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; am. (5), Register, September, 1988, No. 393, eff. 10-1-88; emerg. am. (1), (2) and (7), renum. (3) to (6), (8) to (12) to be (2) to (5), (6) to (10) and am. (3) and (5), eff. 1-1-90; am. (1), r. (2) and (7), renum. (3) to (6), (8) to (12) to be (2) to (5), (6) to (10) and am. (3) and (5), Register, May, 1990, No. 413, eff. 6-1-90.

DOC 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. DOC 310.05.

(2) The ICI then:

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

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

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

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

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

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

(6) The secretary, under s. DOC 310.10, may:

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

(7) If an adopted recommendation is not implemented, the inmate may inform the secretary who shall:

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

History: Cr. Register, April, 1981, No. 304, eff. 5-1-81; emerg. am. (5) and (6) (intro.), r. (7), renum. (8) to be (7) and am. (7) (intro.), eff. 1-1-90; am. (5) and (6) (intro.), r. (7), renum. (8) to be (7) and am. (7) (intro.), Register, May, 1990, No. 413, eff. 6-1-90.

DOC 310.03 Inmate complaint review system. (1) To effectuate the purpose and objectives of s. DOC 310.01, the department 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 department 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; emerg. am. (1) and (4), eff. 1-1-90; am. (1) and (4), Register, May, 1990, No. 413, eff. 6-1-90.

DOC 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. DOC 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 commission acting in any capacity;

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

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(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 may be filed in the ICRS, except that the ICI shall send the ICI's recommendation to the director of the bureau of correctional health services in the department of corrections under s. DOC 310.10; on appeal, the CCE's recommendation shall be sent to the secretary.

(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 department'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; emerg. am. (4) and (5), eff. 1-1-90; am. (4) and (5), Register, May, 1990, No. 413, eff. 6-1-90.

DOC 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.

(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. DOC 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.

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DOC 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. DOC 303.20 and shall not subject the complainants to discipline under that section.

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

DOC 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. DOC 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.

(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. DOC 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.

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(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. DOC 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.

DOC 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. DOC 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.

DOC 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).

(2) Appeals shall be sent to the CCE in a sealed envelope that department employees 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.

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(5) The CCE may use any appropriate investigatory method necessary to make a recommendation to the secretary. The CCE shall have full access to inmates, staff, physical plant, and department 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 department 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 secretary 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 secretary 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; emerg. am. (2), (5), (6) and (10), eff. 1-1-90; am. (2), (5), (6) and (10), Register, May, 1990, No. 413, eff. 6-1-90.

DOC 310.10 Secretary'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 secretary who shall make a decision based on the record within 5 calendar days following receipt of the recommendation. The secretary may take an additional 5 calendar days to make that decision if there is cause and the secretary notifies all interested parties.

(2) The secretary 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 secretary within the time limit, the findings and recommendation of the CCE shall be deemed to be the secretary's decision, and the secretary 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; emerg. am. (1), (2) (intro.) and (3), eff. 1-1-90; am. (1), (2) (intro.) and (3), Register, May, 1990, No. 413, eff. 6-1-90.

DOC 310.11 Departmental review. 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; emerg. r. eff. 1-1-90; r. Register, May, 1990, No. 413, eff. 6-1-90.

DOC 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 secretary's decision, the administrator of the department's division 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 secretary by mail of the failure to implement the decision. The secretary 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 shall initiate rule making.

History: Cr. Register, April, 1981, No. 304, eff. 5-1-81; am. Register, March, 1987, No. 375, eff. 4-1-87; emerg. am. (2) and (3), eff. 1-1-90; am. (2) and (3), Register, May, 1990, No. 413, eff. 6-1-90.

DOC 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. DOC 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.

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

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

DOC 310.14 Reports. (1) The inmate complaint investigator (ICI) shall submit quarterly reports to the secretary and CCE 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 and the secretary. 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; emerg. am. (1) and (2) (intro.), eff. 1-1-90; am. (1) and (2) (intro.), Register, May, 1990, No. 413, eff. 6-1-90.