

Southern Center for Human Rights

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Family Medical Advocacy - Alabama

The Southern Center for Human Rights is a non-profit law office. We represent prisoners in class action lawsuits that challenge unconstitutional conditions in prisons and jails. Unfortunately, we have limited resources to help improve conditions in prisons and jails throughout the South, so we are not able to take on as many cases as we would like. We are only able to take cases where we receive numerous complaints about serious, unconstitutional conduct, and generally limit our cases to class actions. At this time, we are not in a position to take on any new cases at all. We do, however, have some suggestions for you.

First, if your loved one has not already done so, you should make sure he completes the grievance procedure at the facility. The grievance process is a two-step process that allows prisoners to tell the medical staff about the medical problem they are experiencing. These steps may vary from prison to prison, your loved one should look at the inmate handbook at the facility, or ask a member of the medical staff how the grievance procedure works at the facility. Inmate handbooks will sometimes describe the grievance procedure the facility has adopted, including how prisoners can obtain grievance forms, what information should be included in the form, and where they should turn in the forms. The following are the steps of the grievance process:

Step 1--File an "informal grievance": After your loved one has filed a sick call slip requesting to see a member of the medical staff regarding a particular medical, dental or mental health issue and continues to have that problem, he may file an "informal grievance" form. In the "informal grievance" form, he should describe his medical problem fully; for example, include details about the symptoms he is feeling and how long he has had those symptoms. Your loved one should file an informal grievance form close to the time that he begins experiencing a problem with his medical care. Your loved one should receive a response to his informal grievance within approximately 3 days.

Step 2--File a "grievance appeal": After your loved one files an "informal grievance," and receives an unsatisfactory response, he may file an "inmate grievance appeal" form. The "appeal" form is also sometimes called a "formal grievance." If he does not receive a response to his informal grievance after a week, we suggest that he files the appeal. He should receive a response to his appeal within approximately 5 days.

Second, your loved one may already have tried to communicate to the medical staff his medical problems through sick call or verbally, but we would like to emphasize that he should communicate his medical problem to the medical staff whenever he has the opportunity. It may result in your loved one getting some assistance with his problem. This suggestion is not a substitute for filing a sick call and following-up by completing the grievance procedure.

Third, if your loved one has not had any success addressing the problem on his own, we suggest that you write a brief, one-page letter to the head of the prison's medical staff and/or the warden of the facility, reporting the problem and asking for a specific re-

sponse to your loved one's medical situation. If after a week the problem has not been addressed, you should call the prison to follow up. If it is not possible for you to write a letter on your loved one's behalf, you should still call the prison to tell them about your loved one's medical problem. You should keep a copy of any letters that you sent to the prison. You should also keep records of any telephone calls you make to the prison, including the date and time of the call, who you spoke to, and notes on what was discussed.

Fourth, if you do not receive an adequate response from the prison, we suggest that you write to the person in Alabama Department of Corrections who is responsible for overseeing the medical care provided in prisons. The letter should be brief. It should state the problem and explain what you and your loved one have done to solve the problem at the prison. If possible, enclose copies of the grievances your loved one filed and the response he received from the prison medical staff at the facility. The following is the contact information for that office:

Ms. Ruth Naglich
Associate Commissioner for Health Services
Alabama Department of Corrections
301 S. Ripley Street
P.O. Box 301501
Montgomery, Alabama 36130-1501

You may also write to the company hired by the Alabama Department of Corrections to provide medical services to Alabama prisons. Again, your letter should be brief and you should send a copy of the letters and/or grievances your loved one has written to the prison, tell them who you spoke to at the prison, and explain the response you received. Ask them to look into the matter. Here is the contact information:

Sylvia McQueen
Southeastern Regional Medical Director
Alabama Regional Office
Prison Health Services, Inc.
2000 Interstate Park Drive, Suite 103
Montgomery, AL 36109