

Southern Center for Human Rights

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Family Medical Advocacy - Georgia

The Southern Center for Human Rights represents prisoners in class action lawsuits that challenge illegal practices and policies in prisons and jails. Unfortunately, we have limited resources to help improve conditions in prisons and jails throughout the South. We are only able to take cases where we receive numerous complaints about a particular problem, and we generally limit our cases to class actions. Due to our limited resources, we are not able to represent you or to conduct an investigation into the problem you reported. We do, however, have some suggestions for you. We hope that they are helpful.

First, if he hasn't done so already, you should make sure your loved one has gone through all the steps of any administrative grievance procedures at the institution (this is called "exhausting administrative remedies"). In the Georgia prison system, there is a 3-step administrative grievance process. Prisoners must file an informal grievance within 10 days of the incident they are complaining about. Once they receive a response to their informal grievance, they must file a formal grievance within 5 days. If the formal grievance is denied, they have 5 days to file an appeal. It is very important to comply with these deadlines. If they miss the deadlines, they should file their grievance and appeal anyway and explain why they were not able to file them by the date required (e.g. officers would not give them a form). You should tell your loved one to keep records of what he has filed and any responses he receives. If a staff person tells him not to file a grievance, they should be sure to keep track of who said this and when he said it.

If after exhausting the grievance process, your loved one has still been unable to solve the problem you reported, we suggest that you write a brief, one-page letter to the prison's medical director, reporting the problem and asking for a particular resolution. It is usually best to try to work out the problem at the institutional level first. If a week passes and the problem has not been solved, you should try calling the prison to follow up. You should be sure to keep a copy of any letters sent to the prison and to keep records of any telephone calls made to the prison.

If you do not receive an adequate response at the institutional level, we would suggest that you or your friend/family write to the Statewide Medical Director. The following is the contact information for that office:

Dr. Sharon Lewis, Medical Director
Office of Health Services
Georgia Department of Corrections
2 Martin Luther King, Jr. Drive, S.E.
Suite 952, East Tower
Atlanta, GA 30334

Again, the letter should be brief. It should state the problem and explain that you

have tried to solve the problem at the institutional level. The letter should also request a specific resolution of the problem.

Families and friends of prisoners can be highly effective advocates for the safety, health and well being of imprisoned loved ones. One way you can learn how to be a more effective advocate is by contacting Fairness for Prisoners' Families. Fairness has published a very useful *Advocacy Handbook* to assist people to be effective advocates for their loved ones incarcerated in Georgia prisons. Please note that Fairness for Prisoners' Families cannot accept collect calls from prisoners or their loved ones. (In addition, Fairness does not employ lawyers. Please do not contact Fairness for legal assistance). For information about Fairness or a copy of the *Advocacy Handbook*, please contact:

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83 Poplar Street, N.W.
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