

KNOW YOUR RIGHTS: HOW TO USE THE GEORGIA DEPT. OF CORRECTIONS GRIEVANCE PROCEDURE

The following information explains how to use the grievance procedure to address problems you experience while in state custody, which includes state prisons, county prisons, transitional centers, private prisons, probation detention centers and boot camps. This information does not apply to county jails. For the grievance procedure to use in a county jail, ask a jail administrator. If you ever want to file a civil rights lawsuit about something you experienced in prison or jail, you must follow each of the steps of the established grievance procedure and any additional rules that apply to the procedure. Be sure to keep copies of all receipts and make a note of the dates you filed grievances.

ISSUES YOU CAN GRIEVE ABOUT

- Any condition, policy, procedure, action, or lack of action that affects inmates and is in the control of the Department of Corrections.
- Threats, abuse, or harassment of an inmate.
- The computation of sentences.

ISSUES YOU CAN NOT GRIEVE ABOUT

- Parole decisions, sentences, other matters of state law.
- Transfers between institutions.
- Routine housing assignments, unless there is an alleged threat to your safety.
- Disciplinary action (use the "Disciplinary" appeal procedure).
- Administrative segregation (use the "Administrative Segregation" appeal procedure).
- Co-pay charges for health care (use the "Inmate/probationer health concerns or complaints" appeal procedure).

IMPORTANT RULES TO REMEMBER

- You can only include one complaint per grievance.
- You must comply with the deadlines.
- All forms must be completed in blue or black ink.
- Inmates can help each other in completing the forms, but one inmate cannot file a grievance for another.
- Do not use threatening language, profanity, or racial slurs on grievance forms, unless they are part of your complaint.
- You can have only two non-emergency grievances filed at any time, and you can file only one non-emergency grievance a week.

STEP 1: FILE AN INFORMAL GRIEVANCE

- Informal grievance forms are available in the control booths of all living units. Fill out the completed form.
- Give the completed form to your counselor within 10 days of the incident you are complaining about. The counselor will give you a receipt.
- You should get a written response within 10 days of filing the informal grievance.

STEP 2: FILE A FORMAL GRIEVANCE

- After getting a response to your formal grievance, you have 5 days to file a formal grievance.
- Ask your counselor for the formal grievance form.
- File it with the counselor within 5 days and get a receipt from your counselor.
- You will get a written response from the warden or superintendent within 30 days.
- If you don't receive a response within this time, you can appeal to the Commissioner's office, unless a one-time 10-day extension has been authorized and the Grievance Coordinator tells you about it.

STEP 3: FILE AN APPEAL

- If you don't agree with the response to your formal grievance, you have 5 days to file an appeal. Appeal forms should be available in the control rooms of all living units.
- Give the completed appeal form to your counselor.
- Your Counselor will attach your informal and formal grievances. When you file the grievance, your counselor will give you a receipt.
- You should get a written response from the Commissioner's Office within 90 days.

IMPORTANT EXCEPTIONS: EMERGENCY GRIEVANCES

- If you have an emergency that threatens your health or safety, file an emergency grievance on the informal grievance form.
- If the Grievance Coordinator or Duty Officer decides your complaint is a real emergency, immediate action will be taken.
- You should receive a written response within 5 days.
- If officials decide your complaint is *not an emergency*, you will get it back. Then you can file an informal grievance.
- But if you have a complaint about *physical abuse, assault, or sexual harassment* by guards, you do not need to wait for a response to an informal grievance before filing a formal grievance.