



Illinois Prison Grievance Procedure

Prepared by the **Uptown People's Law Center** (updated April 2025)

Why File a Grievance? The grievance process is very important! It makes a record that IDOC knew about your issue and gives them a chance to fix it.

Exhaustion Rule. Before filing a lawsuit, a person in prison **MUST** complete the entire grievance process. This is called “exhausting your administrative remedies.” If you file a lawsuit before completing all four steps, the judge will dismiss your case.

How to File a Grievance

This process can be frustrating. It might not solve your problem. At the same time, this process is really important. Follow the four steps on the back of this handout to complete the process.

Make Copies! Make a copy of every document you submit. You can handwrite your copies. You can also mail copies to a trusted person outside of the prison to save.

Take notes! Keep a timeline of the dates that you finish each step of the grievance process. Write down the date every time you talk to a counselor or guard about your grievance. Take notes on who you talked to and what they said.

Important Deadlines

- You must file a grievance **within 60 days** of the incident (Step 2).

Note: IDOC has no time limit for filing a grievance about sexual abuse. However, you must file a grievance within 2 years of the abuse to be able to file a lawsuit about it.

- You must file your appeal within **30 days** of receiving the Warden's decision (Step 4).
- Courts also have deadlines for filing lawsuits. These are called statutes of limitations. You usually must file a lawsuit within **2 years** after the incident. The deadline might be different depending on your case.

Frequently Asked Questions

What if I don't receive a response? If you do not receive a response at any step of the process, send a letter asking for a status update. You can file a new grievance about the delay. If you move on to the next step, your grievance may be sent back with instructions to wait for a response. Keep a note that you did not receive a response. Also take notes on any status requests you make, including the dates.

What if I was transferred? If the issue happened at a different prison than where you are currently located, mail your grievance directly to the ARB. One exception: you cannot submit grievances about medical issues or lost property directly to the ARB. Submit those grievances in your current prison.

How to Complete the Grievance Process

Step 1: Fill out the grievance form. You must submit the form within 60 days of the incident. Add all the important details: the who, what, when, and where of the incident. Make a copy for yourself to keep.

- If your grievance is about discipline or sexual abuse, skip to Step 3.

Step 2: Submit the grievance form in the grievance box. The counselor's office will review your grievance. You will get a tracking number in the mail. The same tracking number will be on the counselor's response.

- If you do not receive a response within 3-4 weeks, ask the counselor what happened. See the front of this handout for more instructions.

Step 3: Submit your grievance in the institutional mail box. Address the envelope to the Grievance Officer. Include your counselor's response. The Grievance Officer will review the grievance and make a report to the Warden.

- The Warden does not have a set deadline to respond. If you do not receive a response within 2 months, you can try any or all of these options:

Ask the Warden for a response through institutional mail.	File a new grievance about not getting a response from the Warden.	Submit the grievance to the ARB and tell them you have not received a response from the Warden.
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Step 4: To appeal the Warden's decision, write a letter to the ARB. Explain why you disagree with the Warden's decision. You must mail this letter within 30 days after you receive the Warden's response.

- Include copies of: (1) your original grievance, (2) the counselor's response, (3) the Grievance Officer's report, and (4) the Warden's decision.
- If your grievance was denied for being late, explain why you did not submit it on time. The ARB may still consider your grievance if you can show "good cause" for missing the deadline. Try your best to give a reason why you submitted the grievance after the 60-day deadline. Sometimes the ARB makes mistakes about the timeline, so you can also explain that here.
- The ARB has 6 months to respond. This is a very flexible deadline. If you do not receive a response within about 4 months, write a letter to ARB asking for the status of their decision.

Administrative Review Board (ARB)

1301 Concordia Court
P.O. Box 19277
Springfield, IL 62794-9277

Note: You must send your appeal through U.S. mail at your own expense.

For more information

on IDOC grievance policies, ask the law library for Administrative Directive 04.01.114