



FAMILIES NEED SOMEONE TO CALL WHEN THEY GET TURNED AWAY FROM OR MISTREATED IN PRISON VISITING ROOMS.

Family members visiting incarcerated loved ones have little to no redress when they are denied access or treated unfairly.

Family members in Illinois Department of Corrections (IDOC) visiting rooms must rely on the facility's staff to address conflicts or concerns with other employees. These same staff members may be directly involved in the issue.

Restore Justice's staff and family network conducted more than 80 in-person visits in 2019 to IDOC facilities. We have experienced or witnessed hundreds of incidents. These events often resulted in termination of a visit and deterred future visits. Here are a few examples:

- An elderly woman becoming incontinent after being denied access to a bathroom
- A woman being denied a visit with her adult son because of "inadequate underwear"
- A Latino family being denied a visit, without explanation in their own language, because a Correctional Officer lost the required form and refused to search for it
- A baby blanket being taken from an infant by staff, and when the infant cried, staff saying a crying child would not be allowed to visit

Visits Matter for Rehabilitation, Reentry, and Family Outcomes

In 2018, the Illinois General Assembly expanded both the number of visits and number of different visitors an incarcerated person can receive per month (HB 4741).

- Ninety-five percent of people incarcerated in state prisons return home. **Visits are key to rehabilitation, re-entry, and family stability** (Prison Policy Initiative, 2015; the Minnesota Department of Corrections, 2011; Karen De Claire and Louise Dixon, 2011).
- More than 62% of IDOC's incarcerated people have children. Children perform better in school and have fewer behavioral issues when they are able to visit their parents (Children's Contact With Their Incarcerated Parents/National Institutes of Health).

Solution:

Families need a point of contact, outside of their loved one's facility, who can investigate complaints and attempt to resolve issues.

SB 1976 would create a statewide point of contact for IDOC. This point of contact would be tasked with receiving complaints, suggestions, and requests from visitors. Families drive hundreds of miles and spend hundreds of dollars to visit loved ones, and IDOC needs to help ensure these visits are successful.