



VISITING IDOC PRISONS: Why Families Need Someone They Can Call

Restore Justice's staff and family network visit incarcerated people at every prison in Illinois. In 2019, we conducted more than 80 in-person visits to Illinois Department Of Corrections (IDOC) facilities. We have personally experienced or witnessed hundreds of incidents in which family members were denied visits or were treated unfairly. Here are examples:

- Staff denied an elderly woman access to the bathroom, and the woman became incontinent in the visiting room.
- We watched staff tell a woman she could not visit her adult son because of her "inadequate underwear." IDOC policy mandates underwear but does not specify which type or types of underwear are required.
- A young woman went to visit her husband on Christmas Day; she chose her clothes carefully because it was a holiday. She wore a dress (below her knees) and tights. After doing an extensive pat down, staff forced her to lower her tights so they could check her underwear.
- Staff denied a family a visit because a correctional officer lost a required form and refused to search for it. The staff provided no explanation to this family in their own language.
- Prison staff denied a young family a visit because a 3 year old had a sleeveless shirt on and exposed shoulders are not allowed.
- A correctional officer took a baby blanket from an infant, causing the infant to cry. Staff then told the adult a crying child would not be allowed to visit.
- Staff declined to allow a young woman to visit her uncle because they said her pants were too tight, even though she visited the day before wearing the same pair of pants.
- Staff forced an older woman to remove her hijab even though the woman had a letter from the warden permitting the hijab as a religious symbol.
- A man and his wife traveled from several states away to visit the man's incarcerated brother, and they brought the incarcerated person's daughter with them so the girl could see her father. (The man had cancer so he received advanced permission from the warden to visit wearing a mask.) The staff discovered the permission slip for the child was two weeks expired and denied the visit.
- Staff forced an elderly woman to wear her shirt backward during a visit because her collar bone was exposed.
- A correctional officer refused to let a young man visit his brother, saying he was not on the approved visiting list. However, the man had visited several times. They did not allow the man to view the list or prove he was on it.
- A correctional officer ended a visit between a young woman and her husband because the couple sat next to each other, rather than across from each other. The officer said the visitor should have known better.
- Staff turned a family away when the mother could not produce her infant's birth certificate, even though you are not required to have a birth certificate.



- Staff denied a family a visit because they had visited twice during the weekend. The denied visit was on Monday, President Abraham Lincoln's birthday. Staff said the birthday counted as a holiday (and, thus, part of the weekend). When the family requested a list of observed holidays, they were told no list was available.
- Staff denied a man a visit because, on his visitor questionnaire, he said he had never been convicted of a felony but had been incarcerated. He had been incarcerated 10 years earlier for two days on a misdemeanor (not felony) charge. He had previously visited many times and always filled out the form correctly, yet this time he was denied a visit.
- An officer refused to let a woman visit because staff said her a background check indicated she had a felony conviction; staff told her she would have to prove she did not have a felony conviction. She did not get to visit, but was later able to find out a person with the same name lived in California and had a felony conviction. It was not her, and the social security number did not match.