



USING ILLINOIS' FREEDOM OF INFORMATION ACT A BRIEF OVERVIEW

Like any large bureaucracy, the Illinois Department of Corrections is governed and regulated by an extensive amount of rules and regulations which cover most every facet of prison life. In order to ensure that the Department affords you all the rights and privileges a prisoner is entitled to, I have written the following explanation of Illinois' Freedom of Information Act (F.O.I.A.), and how to use it to your benefit.

The purpose of the F.O.I.A. is to provide transparency to the operations of state government. This allows the average individual - prisoners included - to see how state agencies function, how they develop their rules, and how they are intended to be implemented.

Recent changes in Illinois law (Public Act 96-0542) have streamlined the document procurement process, and made it much more user friendly. The major improvements were

1. Cost. The first 50 pages of a request are free, and additional pages cannot cost more than 15 cents per page.
2. Consequences for late responses. If no response is made within five business days, officials may no longer refuse the request on the grounds that it is

burdensome.

To begin the process of learning how to use the F.O.I.A., there are several documents which I would highly recommend that you obtain. They are:

1. From the Attorney General's Office:

Illinois F.O.I.A. Act
Frequently Asked Question by the Public

This is a 12 page document which explains the entire process for obtaining public records.

2. From the Department of Corrections:

Freedom of Information Act
Records Immediately Available for Release

This document identifies a broad array of documents which are immediately available for release.

Index of Department Rules and Administrative Directives.

The index will direct the reader to the specific rule(s) which relate to the issue being researched. For example; if you are attempting to investigate the procedure for restoration of good conduct credits, you would request a copy of A.D. 01.07.550, Calculations, Records, Restoration Process.

To assist you in this endeavor, I have prepared sample letters to obtain these documents; they follow this paper.

My next article will provide the reader with a step-by-step analysis of how the F.O.I.A. provided me with the information necessary to successfully challenge the censorship policies of the prison system.

Date

Office of the Attorney General
%F.O.I.A. Officer
500 S. Second Street
Springfield, IL 62706

Dear Sir or Madam:

In Accordance with the F.O.I.A., I wish to request a copy
of the following publication:

Illinois Freedom of Information Act
Frequently Asked Questions by the Public

Thanking you in advance for your assistance with this
request, I remain:

Sincerely,

Name
Reg. No.
Address

Date

Illinois Department of Corrections
%F.O.I.A. Officer
1301 Concordia Court
P.O. Box 19277
Springfield, IL 62794-9277

Dear Sir or Madam:

In accordance with the F.O.I.A., I wish to request a copy of the following documents that are available from your office:

1. Freedom of Information Act
Records Immediately Available for Release
2. Index of Department Rule and Administrative Directives

Thanking you in advance for your assistance with this request, I remain:

Sincerely,

Name
Reg. No./
Address