

1.3.E.1 Inmate Access to the Courts

I Policy Index:



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Office of Primary Responsibility: DOC Administration

II Policy:

The Department of Corrections (DOC) will afford inmates reasonable access to the courts in all legal claims involving direct appeal from the conviction which they are incarcerated, habeas petitions, civil rights actions or conditions of confinement. Inmates will have access to approved legal forms, legal assistance, legal materials and to his/her attorney to provide them reasonable opportunity to prepare legal documents. Nothing in this policy or processes affect an inmate's ability to independently pursue actions on their own or to obtain outside legal counsel.

III Definitions:

ADA Facility Coordinator:

The staff person assigned to facilitate ADA compliance at each DOC facility and investigate all allegations and complaints by inmates with disability-related issues made known to the Coordinator. The Coordinator shall have the authority to make recommendations to the Warden and ADA Director and implement approved corrective actions to ensure compliance with ADA.

Conditions of Confinement:

Those lawsuits that allege in the initial pleadings an agent, employee or officer of the South Dakota DOC is holding the inmate-plaintiff under circumstances or conditions that violate their rights under the U.S. Constitution.

Legal Documents:

Affidavits, motions, orders, or like documents that constitute pleadings before a court. For purposes of this policy, legal documents are limited to those documents required for writs of habeas corpus, complaints testing conditions of confinement, or direct appeals from an inmate's sentence or conviction.

Legal Staff:

An attorney or paralegal hired by the DOC, either through contract or as a state employee to provide legal assistance to inmates as described in this policy.

IV Procedures:

1. Legal Assistance:

- A. The DOC will make available to eligible inmates, legal staff at each of its adult facilities. Facilities include Mike Durfee State Prison, South Dakota State Penitentiary (includes Jameson Annex) South Dakota Women's Prison (includes Unit E), Sioux Falls Community Work Center, Pierre Community Work Center, Yankton Community Work Center and Rapid City Community Work Center.
- B. Inmates may request assistance from legal staff by sending an completed ADA Request for Accommodation form to the ADA Facility Coordinator (See DOC policy 1.1.E.7 [Americans with Disabilities Act \(ADA\)](#)). The Coordinator will verify the inmate is eligible to receive assistance from legal staff. If determined eligible, the Coordinator or designee shall promptly alert legal staff of the inmate's request of legal assistance.
- C. Inmates eligible for legal assistance by way of legal staff and/or an inmate typist, must meet one of the following criteria:
 1. Limited English proficient, as determined by DOC Education staff. For the purpose of this policy only, this means an inmate who is unable to read, write or speak English.
 2. Illiterate. For the purposes of this policy, this means an inmate who is unable to read or write the English alphabet, as determined by DOC Education staff.
 3. Disabled. For purposes of this policy only, this means an inmate who has a disability that prevents the inmate from drafting pleadings or using an inmate tablet or the kiosks. Inmates known to have a disability or who have requested an accommodation based on having a disability, are tracked within the Comprehensive Offender Management System (COMS).
- D. The DOC will ensure inmates have reasonable access to legal materials, and as determined appropriate, legal staff. All inmates, regardless of eligibility or financial status, will be provided meaningful and reasonable access to the courts (ACA 5-AC1-3D-01), consistent with the legitimate penological objectives of the DOC. All inmates will be permitted opportunity to access legal materials while in DOC custody to prepare legal pleadings, to include:
 1. Opportunity to communicate with the courts and legal counsel (See DOC policies 1.5.D.1 [Inmate Visiting](#), 1.5.D.3 [Inmate Correspondence](#) and 1.5.D.4 [Inmate Access to Telephones and Tablets](#)).
 2. Access to approved legal materials, including those available on LexisNexis on the inmate tablets and kiosks.
 3. Access to approved and available legal forms and copies.
 4. Access to designated computers with OpenOffice software or similar software that allows inmates to type legal documents (See DOC policy 1.5.A.7 [Inmate Use of Computers](#)).
- E. Inmates are permitted to purchase or obtain soft cover legal reference books and printed legal matter sent directly to the inmate from a publisher or distributor, consistent with DOC policy 1.3.C.4 [Inmate Personal Property](#) and DOC policy 1.5.D.3 [Inmate Correspondence](#).

- F. Inmates shall have access to approved legal paper, writing tools and legal and/or manila envelopes through commissary.
- G. Inmates shall have access to free Notary Services through unit staff. Unit staff are not required to notarize documents. Any document presented to a staff member for notarization is subject to review by staff to ensure the staff member is notarizing documents he/she is permitted to notarize.

2. Legal Staff (Contract Attorney):

- A. Legal staff will provide eligible inmates assistance in drafting initial pleadings required to attack the inmate's sentence, either directly or collaterally; or to present a constitutional challenge to the conditions of confinement.
 - 1. Legal staff will provide assistance to eligible inmates in drafting notices of appeal of an inmate's sentence and/or conviction for which they are incarcerated.
 - a. The obligation of legal staff to assist with a notice of appeal does not extend beyond the filing of a notice and a request for appointment of counsel. The obligation arises only upon the refusal or anticipated failure of the inmate's trial counsel to file a notice of appeal.
 - b. In all other applicable circumstances, the duties of legal staff end at the point in which the inmate has his/her case into court.
 - 2. The duties of legal staff will include lawsuits and petitions for writs of habeas corpus in which an inmate housed at an adult DOC facility alleges the South Dakota Board of Pardons & Paroles has acted in a manner violative of rights secured under the U.S. Constitution or the South Dakota Constitution.
 - 3. The DOC is not obligated to provide copies of documents to inmates pursuing general civil claims arising only under state law.
- B. Legal staff will assist eligible inmates in the following matters:
 - 1. Grounded in fact and supported by legal arguments that are warranted by existing law.
 - 2. Contain good faith arguments for the extension, modification, or reversal of existing law.
 - 3. Legal staff may not actively assist inmates in the filing of non-qualified legal claims, which for the purpose of this policy only, are defined as those **not involving** petitions for writs of habeas corpus; or complaints designed to test the conditions of confinement, or habeas petitions in which the inmate alleges the Board of Pardons and Paroles has denied parole to the inmate in a manner that violates the inmate's rights under the U.S. or South Dakota Constitutions.
 - a. Inmates seeking assistance in non-qualified legal claims may seek assistance of outside counsel, the courts or legal assistance offered outside the DOC.
 - b. Nothing in the policy interferes with an inmate's right to retain counsel, to the extent the inmate can afford counsel and is willing to pay for the services or avail themselves to pro bono services of an attorney.

- c. Inmates who are not able to draft pleadings or complete required forms without assistance, who choose not to access legal assistance available at the facility, or who may not be eligible for legal staff assistance, may:
 - 1) Contact an attorney directly, at the inmate's expense; or
 - 2) Request the court appoint an attorney to represent them.
- C. Eligible inmates sentenced under South Dakota law, but who are housed outside the state of South Dakota, whose cause of action in the named categories of cases arose within the state of South Dakota, may contact legal staff to request legal services as described within this policy.
 1. Legal staff will initiate contact with an eligible out-of-state inmate requesting legal services under this provision, not more than ten (10) days after the date the request is posted.
 2. DOC staff will coordinate a time to contact the out-of-state inmate with the out-of-state facility.
- D. Legal staff may not duplicate the work of a private attorney or another recognized legal service assisting the inmate, nor will legal staff provide help to a private attorney or another recognized legal service assisting the inmate.
- E. If an inmate receiving legal assistance is transferred from one DOC facility to another, legal staff assigned to the receiving facility will assume responsibility for providing legal assistance to the transferred inmate and may assist the inmate with any legal assistance already in progress.
 1. If legal staff agrees it would be in the best interest of all parties, legal staff initially assigned to provide legal assistance to the inmate may continue providing legal assistance to the transferred inmate.
- F. Inmates assisting other inmates with legal matters shall do so voluntarily and may not receive any form of compensation. Inmates are permitted to assist other inmates with legal matters; however, inmates will not be permitted to possess the legal work of another inmate outside the presence of the inmate they are assisting. Inmates assisting other inmates with legal work must comply with all facility and DOC rules and regulations. The DOC shall take no affirmative steps to assist inmates in helping other inmates with legal claims. Inmates will not be provided any privileges ordinarily afforded to legal staff, even if the inmate was an attorney before his/her incarceration.
 1. Notwithstanding any other provision relating to inmates assisting other inmates with legal materials, each facility shall provide through an inmate job assignment, an inmate typist position as needed. Duties shall include providing eligible inmates with assistance typing legal materials. Inmates eligible for such assistance are set forth within Section 1 of this policy.
 2. Inmates requiring assistance must notify his or her respective ADA Facility Coordinator, who will determine if the inmate is eligible for the service.
 3. Inmates found charging for legal assistance provided, or bartering in exchange for providing legal assistance, or creating a safety or security concern, are subject to disciplinary action and may be precluded from assisting inmates with legal assistance in the future. No inmate shall be allowed to assist another inmate if the Warden or Deputy Warden determines such action creates a safety risk.

- G. Inmate complaints regarding legal assistance or legal materials must be addressed through the administrative remedy process (See DOC policy 1.3.E.2 *Administrative Remedy for Inmates*).
- H. Inmates seeking judicial or administrative relief will not be subjected to reprisals or penalties because of their decision to seek relief (ACA 5-ACI-3D-01).

3. Copies:

- A. The cost of all legal photocopies will be 5 cents per sheet. Inmates who are indigent will be permitted to make photocopies of legal materials for a value up to, but not exceeding, two dollars (\$2) per month. A new month starts the first full week of the month (if the end of the month falls in the middle of the week, the new month starts the next week).
 - 1. Inmates who do not have sufficient funds to pay for photocopies or legal mail postage at the time of the request may be denied copies or postage if the request is for a non-qualified legal claim.
- B. If special circumstances warrant, an inmate may be allowed to overdraw his/her commissary spending account by two dollars (\$2) per month for the purpose of obtaining legal copies (See DOC policy 1.1.B.2 *Inmate Accounts and Financial Responsibility*).
 - 1. Requests for such copies will be directed to an inmate's unit team, who shall have authority to approve or deny such copies based on the threshold of a maximum overdraft for copies.
 - 2. An inmate will not be allowed to carry a negative balance for the purpose of obtaining copies of documents that pursue general civil claims arising only under state law.

4. Legal Liaison:

- A. Each facility will assign a staff liaison to work with legal staff.
- B. The staff liaison will assist legal staff with the following:
 - 1. Ensure facility compliance with policies, procedures and directives permitting inmates to request and receive legal assistance.
 - 2. Ensure inmates have adequate access to legal materials.
 - 3. Provide and maintain a work area for legal staff to meet with eligible inmates.
 - 4. Assist legal staff in gaining access to the facility and eligible inmate. This includes access to inmates through attorney visits or telephone communication.
 - 5. Support timely response by DOC staff to inmate requests for legal assistance or access to legal materials.
 - 6. Investigate and provide information to the Warden concerning inmate administrative remedy grievances pertaining to legal assistance or access to legal materials.
 - 7. Assist the ADA Facility Coordinator in facilitating timely legal assistance for eligible inmates and coordinating communication between legal staff and eligible inmates.
 - 8. Maintain current contact information for legal staff providing legal assistance to inmates at the facility.

9. Ensure legal materials are current (See [Attachment 1](#)).

5. Conflict of Interest:

- A. Legal staff are not required to provide services to any eligible inmate with whom a bona fide conflict of interest exists. A bona fide conflict of interest does not exist until the following have been confirmed:
 1. Relevant papers from a court of competent jurisdiction have been served, or a formal complaint against the legal staff person has been filed with the South Dakota State Bar by the inmate, or;
 2. Legal staff who normally provide legal assistance to the inmate is the subject of an appeal to the inmate's sentence and/or conviction.
- B. Legal staff will notify DOC immediately of any such determination and will cooperate fully with any alternative legal representative designated/assigned to provide legal contractual services to the inmate.
- C. Eligible inmates are not required to use legal staff in preparing or filing legal documents.

6. Legal Materials:

- A. Legal materials will be maintained for inmate access and use at all adult DOC facilities, within designated locations.
- B. The DOC will provide access to legal reference materials through LexisNexis (or other company provider), via inmate tablets and kiosks, which shall be made available to inmates at all adult DOC facilities.
- C. Procedures are in place at SDSP to provide inmates in the Sioux Falls Community Work Center reasonable access to legal materials and legal assistance. Procedures are in place at MDSP to provide inmates at the Yankton Community Work Center and Rapid City Community Work Center reasonable access to legal materials and legal assistance. Procedures are in place at SDWP to provide inmates at Pierre Community Work Center reasonable access to legal materials and legal assistance.
 1. An approved list of the legal reference materials provided by LexisNexis is found in Attachment 1. Any additions or deletions to the resources identified in [Attachment 1](#) are subject to approval by the DOC attorney.
 2. Inmates may pay a fee to receive a copy of necessary legal materials/forms and maintain these within their cell/room.
 3. All revised or rescinded legal materials or forms shall be promptly removed and/or replaced at the direction of the DOC attorney. Older versions will not be retained or archived.
 4. The DOC does not provide inmates with forms, documents or legal materials from other states. It is the inmate's duty to contact the courts within that state to request such materials or forms.
 5. The DOC reserves the right to discontinue or substitute select legal material subscriptions.

V Related Directives:

- DOC policy 1.1.B.2 – *Inmate Accounts and Financial Responsibility*
- DOC policy 1.1.E.7 – *Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA)*
- DOC policy 1.2.E.1 – *Inmate Commissary*
- DOC policy 1.3.C.4 – *Inmate Personal Property*
- DOC policy 1.3.E.2 – *Administrative Remedy for Inmates*
- DOC policy 1.5.A.7 – *Inmate Use of Computers*
- DOC policy 1.5.D.1 – *Inmate Visiting*
- DOC policy 1.5.D.3 – *Inmate Correspondence*
- DOC policy 1.5.D.4 – *Inmate Access to Telephones and Tablets*

VI Revision Log:

Removed revision history April 2003 – July 2010.

July 2011: **Added** facilities to Section 1. **Deleted** “will not provide legal assistance and” in Section 2 A. 3. **Added** 4. “DOC staff (other than legal staff assigned to the facility) will not provide legal advice to offenders and/or their family members” to Section 2 A. **Added** “or as updates are made available” to Section 5 A. 3.

August 2012: **Added** “Rapid City Minimum Unit” to Section 1 A. **Deleted** “The court or bar has made a preliminary determination that the action has merit” in Section 4 A. 2. **Deleted** “in a suitable and designated place” in Section 5 A.

July 2013: **Reviewed** with no changes.

July 2014: **Deleted** “The DOC will also make provisions for inmates to obtain or provide” and **Replaced** with “Processes and procedures shall be in place for inmates to have reasonable access to legal materials for preparation of legal documents and to” in the policy statement. **Added** “for which they are incarcerated” in Section 2 A. 1. **Added** 3. a. & b. to Section 2 B. **Deleted** “.15 cents and **Replaced** with .25 cents” and **Added** “this is payable through a commissary slip” in Section D. 2. G. and H.2. all in Section 2. **Added** “Inmates deemed indigent in accordance with DOC policy may be allowed to overdraw their account by \$10 per month for the purpose of obtaining legal copies” in Section 2 I. **Added** J. to Section 2. **Added** B. to Section 6 **Added** “Facilities must replace any misplaced or destroyed volumes within a reasonable time after staff become aware of the loss. Facilities are responsible for providing all new additions which are deemed necessary. Out-of-date materials will be properly disposed of when updated materials are received. Facilities are not required to possess and shall not possess older versions of the law. Facilities do not provide archive services” in Section 6 B. 2. **Added** “reasonable” and “law library” and **Added** “Procedures should be included in the unit plan and/or staff may advise inmates of the rules and local procedures governing use of the inmate law library. Under special circumstances, inmates who are unable to visit the law library may obtain legal reference books for use outside the law library” in Section 6 C. **Added** 1. to Section 6 C. **Added** D. to Section 6.

July 2015: **Updated** names of the minimum units. **Added** L. to Section 2.

July 2016: **Reviewed** with no changes.

June 2019: **Changed** title from Inmate Legal Assistance to “Inmate Access to the Courts”. **Revised** policy statement. **Deleted** “staff” and **Replaced** with “Assistance” in Section 1 title. **Added** “for eligible inmates” to Section 1 A. **Deleted** “completing a legal kite and placing the request in the designated repository box on the housing unit (or other designated area(s) of the facility)” and **Replaced** with “sending an ADA Request for Accommodation to the ADA Facility Coordinator. The Coordinator will verify the inmate is eligible to receive assistance from an attorney and, if eligible, will promptly alert legal staff of the inmate’s request” in Section 1 B. **Added** C. 1-3 to Section 1. **Added** D. -G. **Added** “to eligible inmates” in Section 2 A. 1. **Deleted** 4. “DOC staff (other than legal staff assigned to the facility) will not provide legal advice to inmates” in Section 2. A. **Added** “eligible” to section 2 B. **Added** “which for the purpose of this policy are defined as those not involving petitions for writs of habeas corpus, or complaints designed to test the conditions of confinement, appeals from conviction or habeas petitions in which the inmate alleges the Board of Pardons and Paroles has denied parole to the inmate in a manner that violates the inmate’s rights under the U.S. or South Dakota Constitutions” in Section 2 B. 3. **Added** c. 1) and 2) in Section 2 B. **Added** “Inmates are permitted to assist other inmates with legal

matters; however, inmates will not be permitted to possess the legal work of another inmate outside the presence of the inmate to whom the legal work belongs. Inmates assisting other inmates with legal work must comply with all facility and DOC rules and regulations while rendering assistance” in Section 2 F. **Added** 1-3 to Section 2 F. **Added** new section 3. Copies. **Deleted** “ten (\$10) and **Replaced** with “\$2” in Section 3 C. **Deleted** 2. An inmate who is deemed indigent in accordance with DOC policy 1.2.E.1 *Inmate Commissary* may be allowed to overdraw his/her spending account by ten dollars (\$10.00) per month for the purpose of obtaining copies.” in Section 3 C. **Deleted** Section 3. “Special Needs Inmates”. **Added** 4-7 in Section 4 B. **Added** “eligible” to Section 5 A. **Deleted** 1. “Inmates bear their own costs for preparing or filing legal documents in such instances” and **Deleted** 2. “Requests for copies of legal documents prepared or supplied by a source other than legal staff must be approved by legal staff assigned to the facility” in Section 5 C. **Deleted** “reference books” and **Replaced** with “materials” in Section 6 A. **Added** B. to Section 6. **Deleted** “reference books” and **Replaced** with “materials and legal assistance” in Section 6 C. **Added** “provided by Lexis Nexis is found in Attachment 1 and **Added** “Any additions to the resources identified in Attachment 1 are subject to approval by the DOC attorney” in Section 6 C. 1. **Added** 2-3 to Section 6 C. **Deleted** 2. “The legal reference books will be updated annually, or as updates are made available (ACA 4-4276). Facilities must replace any misplaced or destroyed volumes within a reasonable time after staff become aware of the loss. Facilities are responsible for providing all new additions. Out-of-date materials will be properly disposed when updated materials are received. Facilities are not required to possess, and shall not possess, older versions of legal reference books. Facilities do not provide archive services” in Section 6 B. **Added** “or substitute” and **Deleted** “or to substitute appropriate volumes for legal reference books” in Section 6. **Deleted** “Each facility will develop procedures for inmate use and reasonable access to legal reference books/law library (ACA 4-4276). Procedures should be included in the unit plan. Staff may advise inmates of the rules and local procedures governing use of the law library in Section 6. **Deleted** “Under special circumstances, inmates who are unable to visit or access the law library may obtain legal reference books for use outside the law library” in Section 6. **Deleted** “Unauthorized possession of law library materials by an inmate constitutes a prohibited act, generally warranting disciplinary action” in Section 6. **Deleted** “Each facility where legal reference books are maintained will set aside sufficient area where legal reference books will be kept to allow inmates the opportunity to work without the need for removing the materials” in Section 6. **Revised** Attachment 1.

July 2020: Reviewed with no changes.

July 2021: Deleted “Legal” from policy title in the policy header.

Tim Reisch (original signature on file)

Tim Reisch, Interim Secretary of Corrections

08/30/2021

Date

Attachment 1: Legal Reference Books

The South Dakota Department of Corrections agrees to maintain a contract with LexisNexus, which will provide the following materials to inmates via tablets and kiosks:

- 1 South Dakota Codified Law, Annotated.
- 2 South Dakota State caselaw.
- 3 All Federal Courts caselaw.
- 4 USCA: United States Constitution and Amendments.
- 5 South Dakota Constitution.
- 6 Unites States Code Service-Titles 1 through 54.
- 7 South Dakota Court Rules.
- 8 Federal Court Rules.
- 9 Federal Rules Annotated.
- 10 South Dakota Administrative Code.
- 11 Constitutional Rights of Prisoners.
- 12 Criminal Defense Techniques.
- 13 Criminal Law Advocacy.
- 14 Criminal Law Deskbook.
- 15 Moore's Federal Practice-Civil.
- 16 Moore's Federal Practice-Criminal.
- 17 Weinstein's Evidence Manual.
- 18 Ballentine's Law Dictionary.
- 19 The Law Dictionary.
- 20 South Dakota Criminal Pattern Jury Instructions (published by the South Dakota State Bar).

The South Dakota Department of Corrections reserves the right to discontinue selected subscriptions or to substitute appropriate reference materials for those indicated.