



Family Council Resource Guide

Family Councils were developed to give family and friends a voice in prison operations and other important issues that impact families and their incarcerated loved ones. The Department's vision and mission is to positively transform the lives of individuals in their care and custody. We recognize the need to treat all individuals with respect and dignity, valued as human beings. We recognize the importance of family and community connection throughout incarceration and as they transition back into society. Family Councils are integral to partnering with families of the incarcerated *"to improve public safety by positively changing lives."* This work will:

- Enhance communication, to include following established statewide ground rules and model equity, diversity, inclusion, and respect in all interactions,
- Create opportunities to strengthen family and community connections,
- Develop consistency by working together to incorporate best practices,
- Provide family members the opportunity to provide input on related policies and contracts,
- Address local and statewide ideas, issues, and concerns that affect a broad range of incarcerated individuals and their families,
- Address agreed upon areas of highest concern, and review/update annually,
- Promote successful reentry, and
- Annually review vision, mission, and ground rules for family councils and update as needed.

Purpose

This job aid is provided to:

- Define function in detail to support DOC 530.155 *Family Councils*. As a job aid it may be updated between policy revision cycles as directed by the policy author,
- Identify responsibilities of elected family positions,
- Describe methods of communication at both LFC and SFC levels for shared understanding and support the voice of families of incarcerated individuals,
- Develop meaningful opportunities for families and friends to proactively support individuals during incarceration.

General Information

Family Council representatives are the members elected annually each fall by other family members. At the LFC level, families will nominate and hold elections for the following positions:

- LFC Co-chair
- LFC Co-secretary
- SFC facility representative

Statewide Family Council elections are then held following the LFC elections for the following positions:

- SFC Co-chair
- SFC Co-secretary
- SFC Vice-chair (proposed by family feedback)

The Department will ensure that the following positions are assigned in accordance with policy:

- LFC facility co-chair
- LFC facility co-secretary
- SFC department co-chair
- SFC department co-secretary

Meetings

Local Family Council

Local Family Councils consist of family, friends, and community members who are an approved visitor at the facility where the individual is assigned. Additional department employees may be in attendance to address agenda items. When possible, incarcerated individuals may participate. Both the Department and family council members agree to “assume positive intent,” building trust and productive collaborations to benefit families and incarcerated individuals.

The Department is responsible for:

- Engaging in respectful and inclusive interactions,
- Providing meeting space, either in-person or virtually,
- Necessary teleconference communication,
- Collaborating with the family co-chair/co-secretary to provide updates to action items and address council concerns,
- Providing timely posting of meeting minutes both online and within the facility, and
- Support LFC recruitment efforts

Families are responsible for:

- Engaging in respectful and inclusive interactions,
- Utilizing elected family representatives to bring forth agenda items, concerns, and/or ideas regarding local facility operations,
- Collaborating with facility personnel to offer suggestions for family-friendly activities,
- Offering thoughts and asking questions regarding Incarcerated Individual Betterment Fund (IIBF) expenditures and annual planning, and
- Family council recruitment efforts, family orientation for new members, providing navigation for families based on lived experience with agency operations.

Elected representatives are responsible for:

- Communicating with LFC members on a regular basis,
- Represent concerns of families they represent, and

- Attend all scheduled meeting or find a designee to attend in their absence.

Statewide Family Council

Statewide Family Councils are open to all people interested in department-wide issues and initiatives. Meeting schedules may be changed due to statewide emergencies, or when there are non-emergent situations that would affect the delivery of the approved agenda. Department and Family Co-Chair will work to ensure these issues are communicated as quick as possible and determine if the meeting will be rescheduled or cancelled in its entirety.

The Department is responsible for:

- Engaging in respectful and inclusive interactions,
- Providing meeting space, either in-person or virtually,
- Providing updates from executive leadership,
- Review of SFC Action Items and status,
- Including relevant department personnel to address agenda items,
- Working collaboratively with elected family representatives on issues elevated from LFCs, and
- Ensuring meeting minutes and action items are posted in a timely manner online

Family representatives are responsible for:

- Engaging in respectful and inclusive interactions,
- Moving LFC items with agency-wide impacts to the SFC level for review,
- Represent the concerns of families at the local level on statewide issues
- Developing work groups at the local level to obtain feedback on policies, operations, events, and activities in a timely fashion, and
- Family council recruitment efforts, family orientation for new members, providing navigation for families based on lived experience with agency operations.
- To encourage participation without impacting scheduled visitation with loved ones, the Department LFCs may change a meeting to a weekday if the majority of family members will be more available and a vote is passed supporting it.
- For in-person meetings, LFC elected representatives will be allowed to visit their loved one on the same day as a meeting. This may occur even when it is not a designated visit day/time for the incarcerated individual and must be requested and approved in advance.
 - In the event a visit is not possible, a makeup visit during a regular visit session at the facility may occur.

Nominations and Elections

To create a transparent and consistent annual election process the following will occur:

- LFC members will nominate and vote for the following positions:
 - LFC co-chair
 - LFC co-secretary

- SFC facility representative
- LFC facility and family co-chairs will request nominations by October 1st of each year
- Elections will take place during the October LFC meeting with results provided to the Superintendent and SFC co-chairs by October 31st
- Nominees will have the opportunity to except or decline nomination.
- If they accept, they will have the ability to provide a verbal or written statement to families in attendance prior to voting during the October LFC meeting,
- The department will use a simple survey method to gather results from family members in attendance,
- The results will be provided to the elected representatives at the conclusion of voting.
- Following the election at the local level, elections for the SFC will occur for the following positions:
 - SFC co-chair
 - SFC Vice-chair
 - SFC co-secretary
- Nominations for SFC positions are due by November 1st with elections occurring prior to the November SFC meeting.
- Only current SFC facility representatives, SFC co-secretary, and SFC co-chair (and vice-chair if present) are authorized to vote on SFC nominations.
- Those nominated will have the opportunity to provide a written statement to the SFC prior to voting.
- Nominees must be available to commit to one year of service.
- A simple survey method will be used with both the SFC family and department co-chairs reviewing the results
- Results will be provided by the SFC family co-chair via email following completion of the review with the SFC department co-chair
- All newly elected individuals will be introduced during the November SFC meeting
- All newly elected representatives will work with existing elected representatives, taking over on January 1st of the new year.

Family Council Positions and Responsibilities

Family Elected Representatives

1. Local Family Co-Chair
 - a. This elected position is responsible for providing equitable representation for family members bringing issues forward that affect their loved ones at the facility where they are housed.
 - i. Commitment to the work of the family council

- ii. Work with families, incarcerated individuals and staff to identify agenda items.
 - iii. Meet with the facility co-chair to establish a mutually agreed upon agenda two weeks before the meeting.
 - iv. Jointly facilitate LFC meetings.
 - v. Meet to review meeting minutes prior to finalization within ten business days of the meeting.
 - vi. Jointly manage action items and accomplishments with facility co-chair.
2. Local Family Co-Secretary
- a. This elected position is responsible for the clerical support and documentation for families.
 - i. Will take LFC meeting minutes during the meeting, then will work together with the facility co-secretary to finalize a single draft of meeting minutes within five business days.
 - ii. May be asked to fill in for family co-chair during absences.
3. Statewide Family Council Facility Representative
- a. This elected position is responsible for coordinating issues that have a statewide impact to families and incarcerated individuals, moving them from the local to the statewide level for possible action.
 - i. Attends LFC and works with participants and co-chairs to elevate statewide issues.
 - ii. Sends written notification to SFC Family Co-chair of the issue being presented for statewide consideration.
 - iii. Attends to any emails or provides presentations of the topic, as necessary, prior to the SFC co-chair's determining if it will be accepted as an agenda item during a SFC meeting.
 - iv. Attends SFC Meetings
 - v. Communicates back to the LFC any issues received at the SFC level, pushing down events, activities, department requests or emails/notifications.
 - vi. Ensures equitable and informative liaison activities between local and state councils for facility.
4. Statewide Family Co-Chair
- a. This position is responsible for leading facility SFC representatives to bring issues, concerns, ideas, and proposals forward that have statewide impacts to families and their incarcerated loved ones. If a vice-chair is seated, no election occurs for this position.
 - i. Will work collaboratively with all family SFC representatives, to bring statewide issues for discussion to department SFC co-chair.
 - ii. Communicates back to SFC representatives and other family members regarding possible agenda items for SFC meetings.

- iii. Meets with department SFC co-chair to set agenda items two weeks in advance of scheduled meeting.
 - iv. May participate in work and/or focus groups, as desired.
 - v. Co-facilitates SFC meetings with department co-chair.
- 5. Statewide Family Vice-Chair
 - a. This elected position is responsible for supporting the work of the current family SFC co-chair, to learn position, stay engaged with topics, and to move into the SFC Family co-chair position the following year. It is intended to “bridge” knowledge and support momentum of issues important to families and their incarcerated loved ones.
 - i. Attend all SFC meetings.
 - ii. May take projects or forward communication to assist family co-chair.
 - iii. May fill in for family co-chair during absences.
 - iv. May participate in work and/or focus groups, as desired.
- 6. Statewide Family Co-Secretary
 - a. This elected position is responsible for clerical support and documentation needs of the Statewide Family Council.
 - i. Will take minutes of SFC meetings, transcribe and provide to department co-secretary within five business days of scheduled meeting.
 - ii. Will collaborate with department co-secretary to clarify content and jointly submit to co-chairs for review within ten business days of scheduled meeting.
 - iii. May set up separate meetings for family SFC co-chair to meet with families or SFC representatives.
 - iv. Communicates messages via email at the request of family co-chair and vice-chair, as appropriate and agreed upon.

Department Appointed Representatives

- 1. LFC Department Co-Chair
 - a. This position is either the Superintendent or designated extended leadership team member at the facility.
 - i. Arrange either in-person or virtual resources for meeting venue.
 - ii. Ensure facility personnel attend or have provided feedback for agenda items. Includes ensuring that all reoccurring agenda and action items are managed appropriately and in a timely manner.
 - iii. Meet with the facility co-chair to establish a mutually agreed upon agenda two weeks before the meeting.
 - iv. Jointly facilitate LFC meetings.
 - v. Meet to review meeting minutes prior to finalization within ten business days of the meeting.

- vi. Jointly manage action items and accomplishments with facility co-chair.
1. LFC Department Co-Secretary
 - a. This position is assigned by the Department Co-chair and is responsible for the clerical support and documentation for the overall minutes and action items.
 - i. Will take LFC meeting minutes during the meeting, then will work together with the family co-secretary to finalize a single draft of meeting minutes within five business days.
 2. SFC Department Co-Chair
 - a. This Prisons Division position is appointed by the Deputy Secretary.
 - i. Works collaboratively with Family Co-Chair to review, organize, plan, and discuss statewide issues submitted from families and/or elevated from the local SFC Representatives for statewide review.
 - ii. Meets with department SFC co-chair to set agenda items two weeks in advance of scheduled meeting.
 - iii. Ensures Department staff/contractors are present to discuss agenda or action items where appropriate.
 - iv. Addresses problem areas or concerns of Department processes related to the SFC.
 - v. Co-facilitates SFC meetings with department co-chair.
 1. SFC Department Co-Secretary
 - a. This position is assigned by the Department Co-Chair.
 - i. Arranges SFC meeting venue, whether in-person or virtual.
 - ii. Posts agenda working with the Department web team two weeks prior to the meeting with appropriate virtual web links.
 - iii. After receiving SFC meeting minutes from Family Co-Secretary, will review and update draft minutes as needed (e.g., additional information).
 - iv. Submit updated draft minutes to the co-chairs for review and approval on DOC 03-513 Family Council Meeting Minutes within 21 days after the meeting.
 - v. Ensure meeting dates and times are scheduled and posted for the following year by October 31st on the Family & Visitors page of the Department's website.
 - vi. Ensure approved meeting minutes are distributed and posted within 10 days of finalization on the Family & Visitors page of the Department's website.

Agenda Items

Local Family Council

LFC meetings are established to address issues relative to that specific facility to allow families to work with local leadership on important topics affected families and their loved ones. Standard agenda items include:

- General facility operational status, if necessary – any change in normal operations.

- Family-centered activities; upcoming events; visit room “pop-up” proposals
- Local Business Advisor IIBF reporting
- Review of Action Items and current status

Additional topics could include:

- Visit room improvements
- Food issues
- Access to programs
- Other issues brought forward by families

When issues are brought to the LFC that appear to or could expand to statewide impact, the SFC Representative (or LFC co-chair in the absence of a designated SFC rep) will elevate the issue for conversation with the SFC co-chair and other facility representatives. Issues that impact more than 2-3 facilities will be discussed between the SFC family and department co-chair for possible SFC agenda items.

Statewide Family Council

Proposed SFC agenda items are agreed upon between the family SFC and department co-chairs in advance of scheduled meetings. Approved items are designed to discuss issues that have statewide impact and are not individual facility concerns or specific incarcerated individual challenges. Family members may continue to work through the facility LFC representatives for facility-specific issues or facility staff regarding issues specific to one incarcerated individual.

Standard agenda items include:

- Review of Action Items; updates; accomplishments; closures
- Secretary or Deputy Secretary time
- Two open public forums
- Items approved by both SFC co-chairs

Meeting minutes for both LFC and SFC meeting will be provided on agency public web site and facility-specific locations.

Special Projects, Focus Groups, and Process Reviews

- A. Subgroups may be created through the SFC to look at a specific issue or item.
Subgroups may:
 1. Consist of volunteer participants from the councils and Department employees.
 2. Provide written recommendations/results to the SFC upon conclusion of the focus group’s work.