Family Council Resource Guide

Family Councils have been 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 individuals with respect and dignity, acknowledge their value, and 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 statewide rules and model professionalism, 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 with the opportunity to offer input on related policies and contracts.
- Address local and statewide ideas, issues, and concerns that affect a broad range of individuals and their families.
- Address agreed upon areas of concern, and review/update annually.
- Promote successful reentry, and
- Annually review vision, mission, and rules for family councils and update as needed.

This job aid is provided to:

- Define function in detail to support DOC 530.155 Family Councils. 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 Local Family Council (LFC) and State Family Councils (SFC) levels for shared understanding and support the voice of families of individuals.
- Develop opportunities for families and friends to 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

SFC 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

LFCs 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. Both the Department and family council members agree to "assume positive intent," building trust and productive collaborations to benefit families and individuals.

The Department is responsible for:

- Engaging in respectful and inclusive interactions.
- Providing a 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.
- Supporting LFC recruitment efforts.

Families are responsible for:

- Engaging in respectful, professional, and inclusive interactions,
- Using elected family representatives to share agenda items, concerns, and/or ideas regarding local facility operations.
- Family council recruitment efforts, family orientation for new members, providing navigation for families based on lived experience with Department operations.
- Encouraging participation without impacting scheduled visitation. The 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 individual and must be requested and approved in advance.

    - If a visit is not possible, a make-up visit during a regular visit session at the facility may occur.

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

SFCs 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. The Department and Family Co-Chair will work to ensure these issues are communicated as quickly as possible and determine if the meeting will be rescheduled or cancelled.

The Department is responsible for:

- Engaging in respectful, professional, 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.
- Ensuring meeting minutes and action items are posted in a timely manner online.

Family representatives are responsible for:

- Engaging in respectful, professional, and inclusive interactions.
- Moving LFC items with Department-wide impacts to the SFC level for review.
- Representing 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.
- Family council recruitment efforts, family orientation for new members, providing navigation for families based on lived experience with Department operations.

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 accept 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 take place 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, (i.e., SFC Co-Secretary, SFC Co-Chair, and Vice-Chair 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 Department Co-Chair or Co-Secretary via email following completion of the review with the SFC family 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

- Local Family Co-Chair
    - Responsible for providing equitable representation for family members, bringing issues forward that affect their loved ones at the facility where they are housed.
        - Commitment to the work of the family council and facility staff.
        - Works with families, individuals and staff to identify agenda items.
        - Meets with the facility Co-Chair to establish a mutually agreed upon agenda two weeks before the meeting.
        - Jointly facilitates LFC meetings.
        - Reviews meeting minutes prior to finalization within three weeks prior to the next meeting.
        - Jointly manage action items and accomplishments with facility Co-Chair.

- Local Family Co-Secretary
    - Responsible for the clerical support and documentation for families.
        - Takes 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.
        - May be asked to fill in for family Co-Chair during absences.
- Statewide Family Council Facility Representative
    - Responsible for coordinating issues that have a statewide impact to families and individuals, moving them from the local to the statewide level for possible action.
        - Attends LFC and works with participants and Co-Chairs to elevate statewide issues.
        - Notifies SFC Family Co-Chair of the issue being presented for statewide consideration.
        - Attends to emails and provides presentations of the topic, as necessary, before the SFC Co-Chair determines if it will be an agenda item.
        - Attends SFC Meetings
        - Communicates back to the LFC issues received at the SFC level, regarding events, activities, department requests or emails/notifications.
        - Ensures equitable and informative liaison activities between local and state councils for facilities.
- Statewide Family Co-Chair
    - Responsible for leading facility SFC representatives to bring issues, concerns, ideas, and proposals forward that have statewide impacts to families and their loved ones. If a Vice-Chair is seated, no election occurs for this position.
        - Works collaboratively with all family SFC representatives, to bring statewide issues for discussion to department SFC Co-Chair.
        - Communicates back to SFC representatives and other family members regarding possible agenda items for SFC meetings.
        - Meets with Department SFC Co-Chair to set agenda items 30 days in advance of scheduled meeting.
        - May participate in work and/or focus groups, as desired.
        - Co-facilitates SFC meetings with department Co-Chair.
- Statewide Family Vice-Chair
    - 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 loved ones.
        - Attends all SFC meetings.

        - May take projects or forward communication to assist family Co-Chair.
        - May fill in for family Co-Chair during absences.
        - May participate in work and/or focus groups, as desired.
- Statewide Family Co-Secretary
    - Responsible for clerical support and documentation needs of the Statewide Family Council.
        - Takes minutes of SFC meetings, transcribe and provide to department Co-Secretary within two weeks of previous SFC meeting.
        - Collaborates with Department Co-Secretary to clarify content.
        - May set up separate meetings for family SFC Co-Chair to meet with families or SFC representatives.
        - Communicates messages via email at the request of family Co-Chair and Vice-Chair, as appropriate and agreed upon.

Department Appointed Representatives

- LFC Facility Co-Chair
    - This position is either the Superintendent or designated extended leadership team member at the facility.
        - Arranges either in-person or virtual resources for meeting venue.
        - Ensures 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.
        - Meets with the facility Co-Chair to establish a mutually agreed upon agenda two weeks before the meeting.
        - Jointly facilitates LFC meetings.
        - Meets to review meeting minutes prior to finalization within 30 days of the next scheduled LFC meeting.
        - Jointly manages action items and accomplishments with facility Co-Chair.
- LFC Facility Co-Secretary
    - This position is assigned by the Facility Co-Chair and is responsible for the clerical support and documentation for the overall minutes and action items.
        - 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.
- SFC Department Co-Chair
    - This Prisons Division position is appointed by the Deputy Secretary.
        - Works collaboratively with SFC 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.

        - Meets with SFC Family Co-Chair to set agenda items.
        - Ensures Department staff/contractors are present to discuss agenda or action items where appropriate.
        - Addresses problem areas or concerns of Department processes related to the SFC.
        - Co-facilitates SFC meetings with SFC Family Co-Chair.
- SFC Department Co-Secretary
    - This position is assigned by the SFC Department Co-Chair.
        - Arranges SFC meeting venue, whether in-person or virtual.
        - Posts agenda working with the Department web team two weeks prior to the meeting with appropriate virtual web links.
        - After receiving SFC meeting minutes from SFC Family Co-Secretary, reviews and updates draft minutes as needed (e.g., additional information).
        - Submits updated draft minutes to the Co-Chairs for review and approval on DOC 03-513 Family Council Meeting Minutes within 30 days of the SFC meeting.
        - Ensures 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.
        - Ensures 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 affecting 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 Incarcerated Individual Betterment Fund 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 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 individual.

Standard agenda items include:

- Review of Action Items, updates, accomplishments, closures.
- Secretary or Deputy Secretary time.
- Open public forums.
- Items approved by both SFC Co-Chairs.

Meeting minutes for both LFC and SFC meeting will be posted on the Department's public web site and facility-specific locations.

Special Projects, Focus Groups, and Process Reviews

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