

Summary of Inmate Rights

Inmates have the right to many resources, including medical care. While inmate rights vary from state to state and country to country, common inmate rights exist. These include the right to meals, telephones, mail, showers and other resources. Consider this list of common inmate rights.

Legal Rights

Inmates have the right to:

- Due process when undergoing the appeals process.
- The parole process.
- Protection against unfair treatment because of race, sex, religion or nation of origin.
- Not be racially segregated.
- The right to speech, but this may be limited.

Medical Services

Inmates have the right to:

- Medical services when sick or injured.
- Face-to-face meetings with medical personnel.
- Emergency medical and dental services at all hours.
- Mental health care, including preliminary screenings, stabilization, treatment and medication support services.
- Hearings if law enforcement wishes to move them into mental health facilities.
- Accommodations according to the Americans with Disabilities Act.

Female inmates have the right to:

- Seek abortions if desired.
- Undergo childbirth outside of jail.

Expectant mothers may not be coerced into seeking adoption or foster care services, but these need to be provided if desired.

Religion

Inmates have these religious rights:

- Free practice of their religion.
- Access to appropriate religious books, or texts.
- Ability to attend a religious service within the prison if available.
- Ability to engage in prayer.
- Ability to recognize one's designated Sabbath day.

Meals

Inmates have the right to:

- 3 meals in a 24-hour period, including one meal with hot food.
- 15 minutes to consume each meal.

Communication

Inmates have the right to:

- Communicate with the outside world in various ways, including reasonable access to a telephone and regular visits from friends and family.
 - One hour per week is the recommended minimum visitation right, according to the American Civil Liberties Union.
- Meet with their attorney (unlimited).
- Receive media, including magazines, newspapers and books, if these are mailed directly from the publisher and not intermediary vendors.
 - The American Civil Liberties Union recommends no more than three books, one newspaper, and two periodicals per inmate at one time.

Voting and Recreation

Inmates have the right to

- Vote by absentee ballot in some circumstances if they are registered to vote.
 - This applies to inmates who have not yet been convicted of a crime but are awaiting trial.
- 3 hours of exercise outside their cells each week.

Discipline

The Constitution protects inmates from cruel and unusual punishment.

- Inmates may be subject to minor discipline activities, including extra work, removal from work assignment, suspended privileges--including television, telephones and commissary--and lockdowns of up to 24 hours.
- Inmates may not be denied food, showers or access to attorneys.
- Through litigation and legislation, the law has specified some rights that fall under these broad constitutional freedoms. For example, the Supreme Court case *Brown v. Plata* found that overcrowded conditions constitute cruel and unusual punishment.

Regarding discipline, Inmates also have the right to:

- Live in humane conditions.
- Receive protection from sexual violence.
- Not incur physical abuse from other inmates or staff.

Complaints

Inmates have the right to file complaints if they believe any of their rights have been violated.