

STATE AUDITOR DOUG HOFFER

Press Release

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Auditor Doug Hoffer Releases Audit of Department of Corrections’ Handling of Inmate Grievances

DOC’s Grievance System Plagued by Incomplete Information and Suffers from Lack of Executive Level Oversight

MONTPELIER, VT – State Auditor Doug Hoffer released a new audit today of the inmate grievance system in Vermont’s correctional facilities. State law requires the Department of Corrections (DOC) to have a process for receiving and managing inmate complaints. The auditors encountered significant deficiencies in DOC’s IT program which prevented a systemwide audit of the department’s compliance with its own rules and policies, but they were able to uncover numerous problems that can put inmates and staff at risk.

“It can be tempting to brush off prisoners’ complaints in light of the actions that led to their incarceration,” Hoffer said. “But correctional officials universally agree that a fair and effective grievance system is critical to maintaining a safe environment behind prison walls. When inmates’ complaints are handled quickly and professionally they are less likely to act out in ways that pose a danger to themselves, fellow inmates, or correctional officers.”

Hoffer added: “The lack of a reliable computer system to track grievances should be a concern for all Vermonters. Not only could a failure to address legitimate concerns in a timely manner put the taxpayers at financial risk in the courts, but it also prevents management from detecting troubling trends in a facility or with specific staff. Several well-publicized instances of alleged staff misconduct in recent years highlight the importance of good data in this area, and the consequences of not having it.”

Notable findings in the audit include:

- DOC’s Offender Management System (OMS) cannot be used to reliably determine the number, type, facility, status, and outcomes of grievances because grievance records and data were missing and data in OMS was inaccurate or otherwise unusable. In addition, OMS does not contain data that can be used to track the timeliness of DOC’s responses to grievances filed.
- Dozens of instances were found in which DOC did not provide clear responses to grievances or did not respond at all. Moreover, DOC does not have a process to confirm that actions promised in response to grievances were taken.
- DOC has not designated an executive to be responsible for ensuring that the grievance process is working as intended and to look for trends indicating potential problems that should be addressed departmentwide, at a particular facility, or with a particular aspect of the process.

Hoffer said: “The men and women who work in the Department of Corrections have very challenging jobs. I am heartened that the Department has indicated it will implement all the recommendations we made in our audit, which will make it easier for staff to get their jobs done at the highest level of performance.”

To view the report, please click [here](#).