



Department of Mental Health

Grievance and Dispute Resolution Procedure **FAIR: Finding Answers, Improving Relationships**

FAIR—Finding Answers, Improving Relationships—is the formal grievance process through which a consumer can voice a concern or complaint. A grievance can be filed by the individual receiving mental health services or by any person on behalf of the individual. Every consumer has the right to file a grievance without fear of retaliation or loss of service. The **FAIR** process supports self-advocacy and ensures that consumers are heard.

How To File A Grievance

The grievance must be in writing. To facilitate gathering information and to allow a quick resolution, you must file a grievance within six months after the incident that caused your dissatisfaction. However, depending on the circumstances, a grievance can be accepted after six months.

If your grievance is about the provider where you receive services, you can file your grievance there. Each mental health provider is required to identify a grievance coordinator whose job it is to help a consumer file a grievance. You can give the grievance to the grievance coordinator or any employee you choose at your mental health provider. Or, you can file your grievance with the Office of Consumer and Family Affairs who will forward the grievance to the provider. If your grievance is about a DMH rule, the actions of a DMH employee, or Saint Elizabeths Hospital, you must file your grievance with the Office of Consumer and Family Affairs.

When filing a written grievance, be as specific as possible about what caused your dissatisfaction and what you believe is a good solution. The Office of Consumer and Family Affairs can assist you in filing your grievance. You also can contact the

Consumer Action Network (CAN), an independent peer advocacy agency, to assist you.

Resolving a Grievance

Once your grievance is received, a response must be given to you within 10 business days. However, if the grievance alleges abuse, a response is required sooner—within five business days. If you are not satisfied with the decision, you can request an external review through the Office of Consumer and Family Affairs. The request must be received within 10 business days.

External Review. The Office of Consumer and Family Affairs will explain your options to you and schedule the appeal with an External Reviewer who is a skilled professional with training and experience in mediation and dispute resolution. An External Reviewer is not an employee of DMH.

If you choose mediation and a solution is reached, the grievance is settled. If a hearing is held, after listening to both sides, the External Reviewer will issue an advisory opinion to the DMH Director. You will receive a copy of this opinion and you have the right to add comments for the Director to consider. The Director will review the grievance, the response, the advisory opinion and any comments and make a decision within 10 business days

The Office of Consumer and Family Affairs maintains a record of each grievance. You may request to see the record of your grievance at any time.

For Assistance:

Office of Consumer and Family Affairs:
(202) 673-4377 Fax (202) 673-1933

Consumer Action Network (CAN): (202) 842-0001