



**Mendocino County**  
**Department of Social Services**  
*Healthy People, Healthy Communities*



<b>Title</b>	External and Welfare Program Civil Rights Complaints
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**Purpose:**

The purpose of this procedure is to ensure that complaints regarding the Mendocino County Department of Social Services (MCDSS) and programs within are treated in a uniform, consistent, and fair manner. This document provides definitions and procedural steps to handle external complaints regarding Mendocino County policies and Department personnel, procedures, and authorized service practices. This includes initial actions to take when receiving external complaints and outlining the process for addressing external complaints. Complaints regarding welfare program civil rights are included herein and described in further detail in the MCDSS Civil Rights Plan.

**Department Standard:**

MCDSS is dedicated to upholding high standards of service and ensuring a safe and inclusive environment for every staff member and client. MCDSS values client, customer, recipient, and stakeholder feedback and is committed to resolving any complaints they may have. This document explains how to file an external complaint and a welfare program Civil Rights Complaint.

NOTE: This procedure is meant for Department services clients, customers, recipients, or community stakeholders (hereby referred to as “clients” for brevity). Contract disputes or other business-related complaints should be taken to the authorizing agent. Likewise, client disputes related to denials, discontinuances, or changes in benefits shall be directed to the California Department of Social Services (CDSS) State Hearings Division (SHD) or a County Administrative Hearing/Review depending on the program involved.

Client disputes related to denial, discontinuance, or change in benefits can be appealed to the California Department of Social Services (CDSS) State Hearings Division (SHD) by written appeal, telephone, or online. Often what starts as a complaint to a supervisor will be directed to the route of a State Hearing if the client is unsatisfied after being provided with an explanation, and the issue is not customer service specific, but related to a county action.

For General Assistance (GA), there is a County Administrative Hearing for similar circumstances, denial, discontinuance, or change in benefit. The client can file an appeal in person, writing or by telephone (no online appeal availability for GA).

**Scope:**

This procedure pertains to all Probationary, Part-time, Extra Help, and Full-Time permanent Mendocino County Department of Social Services employees, its contractors, and their subcontractors, as well as clients, customers, recipients and stakeholders.

**Definitions:**

*Area or Service Area:* Service Areas include Family and Children’s services (FCS), Employment & Family Assistance Services (EFAS), Adult and Aging Services (AAS), and Department Administration (Admin).

*Civil Rights Complaint:* Complaint from a covered welfare program client alleging discrimination or harassment based on race, color, national origin, political affiliation, religion, marital status, gender, age, sexual orientation, ethnic group identification, domestic partnership, or disability; or alleging retaliation against an individual because the individual complained or asserted his/her rights regarding such discrimination or harassment.

*Fact Gathering:* A systematic and thorough process of inquiry or examination conducted to uncover facts, gather evidence, and establish the truth about a specific matter, incident, or allegation. Investigations, in this context, are often carried out to resolve disputes, determine accountability, or ensure compliance with regulations and policies.

**Sharepoint InterestNET:**

All Social Services procedures are posted on the departmental InterestNet on SharePoint.

**Procedure:**

If a client, customer, recipient or community stakeholder is dissatisfied with any aspect of MCDSS services, Department staff will advise them to follow the steps outlined below to submit a complaint.

**I. External Complaints Process (General Complaints)**

**A. Step 1: Informal Discussion**

1. Clients are encouraged to first reach out informally to staff directly involved in the matter. Often, discussing the issue directly can lead to a quick and amicable resolution.
2. Clients may contact staff via email or phone to explain the concern. The Department is committed to understanding issues brought forward by complaints and providing those complaints with a timely response.
3. Staff shall document any informal discussions with clients. This may be captured in an email to the client or otherwise notated. There is also a MCDSS complaint form.

**B. Step 2: Complaint Submission**

1. If the issue is not resolved through informal discussion or, if the client prefers a formal approach, the complaint may be submitted using one of the following methods:
  - a. In person: complaint forms are available to clients in MCDSS lobbies or by request
  - b. By phone: client should indicate that they would like to file a complaint with their program supervisor or manager and follow the process herein

- c. Online Complaint Form: available on mendocinocounty.gov
- d. Email: DSScomplaints@mendocinocounty.gov with a detailed explanation
  - i. NOTE: Admin staff will acknowledge emailed complaints and disseminate it to the appropriate service area
- e. Postal Mail: Please reference the specific division in your correspondence (FCS, EFAS, AAS, etc.) and with the following address lines: ATTN: Deputy Director, PO Box 1060, Ukiah, CA 95482

C. When submitting a complaint, please include the following details:

- 1. Client contact information (name, email, phone number).
- 2. A clear description of the complaint (dates, events, staff involved).
- 3. Any supporting documentation (correspondence, documents, screenshots, etc.).
- 4. Desired resolution or outcome.

D. Acknowledgment of Client Complaint

- 1. Once a formal complaint is received, it will be acknowledged by staff within the Service Area who received it or their immediate supervisor or manager within seven (7) days either in writing or by email. This acknowledgment will outline the next steps in the process and provide an expected timeline for resolution.

E. Investigation of the Complaint

- 1. Complaints shall be reviewed by a supervisor or manager over the staff who received the complaint and assigned to any relevant service area or individual who is best placed to address the issue. The level of staff that may investigate complaints will be at the discretion of the service area. The client may be contacted for further information if necessary to ensure a thorough investigation.
- 2. If a resolution is not immediately possible, the client will be informed by staff investigating the complaint of the situation and provided an expected timeline for resolution.

F. Resolution and Communication

- 1. After investigating the complaint, staff will determine the outcome and the steps taken to resolve the issue raised in the complaint, if substantiated. Depending on the nature of the complaint, certain solutions may be administered, such as:
  - a. A correction or rectification of the issue
  - b. An apology
  - c. A benefit correction (where applicable)
  - d. A change to services or procedures to prevent recurrence
- 2. Clients will be informed of the resolution in writing. This may include corrective actions taken by the Department, if the complaint is substantiated
  - a. NOTE: Due to the nature of certain complaints, sensitive information may be redacted or withheld from the final response

G. Escalating the Complaint

- 1. If a client is not satisfied with the resolution or believes the issue has not been adequately addressed, the client can escalate the matter with the following steps:
  - a. Contact the MCDSS Director, providing all relevant details and reasons for dissatisfaction
  - b. A further review of the complaint will be conducted, and

- c. A final decision will be provided to the client in writing. If substantiated, this may include corrective action. Sensitive information may be withheld from the final response

#### H. Confidentiality and Data Protection

1. All complaints are handled in a confidential manner. Personal information and complaint details will not be shared without prior consent, except where necessary to resolve the matter.
2. Due to the nature of certain complaints, sensitive information may be redacted or withheld from the final response.
3. Disclosure of employee names in written responses require Director approval.
4. The Department complies with all relevant data protection regulations and takes privacy seriously.

#### I. Feedback and Continuous Improvement

1. After the complaint has been resolved, staff may ask for feedback on how the complaint process was handled. This helps the Department improve services and address areas of improvement.

## II. Welfare Program Civil Rights Complaint Process

#### A. Common Covered Welfare Programs include CalFresh, CalWORKs, CPS, IHSS, and other public assistance programs.

1. To find out if your program is covered, please contact the Civil Rights Coordinator: [dss\\_civilrightscoordinator@mendocinocounty.gov](mailto:dss_civilrightscoordinator@mendocinocounty.gov)

#### B. How to File a Welfare Program Civil Rights Complaint

1. If a client believes their civil rights have been violated, either staff or clients can file a complaint using one of the following methods:
  - a. Contact the Department Directly
    - i. Before filing a complaint, clients are encouraged to inquire about any special accommodation that may have gone unoffered. Sometimes, this can lead to a quick resolution
  - b. Submitting a Formal Complaint
    - i. If the issue is not resolved informally, please make a reasonable attempt to submit a Civil Rights complaint. In writing is preferred but not required. Please route ALL Civil Rights complaints to the Civil Rights Coordinator as soon as they are received. Clients can file a complaint either:
      1. In person: Civil Rights complaint forms, known as Gen 1179, are located at MCDSS offices by request
      2. Online Form: Available on [CDSS.gov](http://CDSS.gov) in both English and Spanish
      3. Email: Send to [dss\\_civilrightscoordinator@mendocinocounty.gov](mailto:dss_civilrightscoordinator@mendocinocounty.gov)
      4. Mail: Send a letter with details of the complaint to ATTN: Civil Rights Coordinator at PO Box 1060, Ukiah, CA 95482.
      5. Phone: Civil Rights Coordinator desk line (707) 467-5860
    - ii. NOTE: a complaint does not require written submission to be a valid Civil Rights complaint
2. When filing the complaint, please include:

- a. Client's full name and contact information
- b. A clear description of the incident(s) including dates, locations, and individuals involved
- c. Any supporting documentation (e.g., emails, photographs, or other evidence)
- d. A brief explanation of how client civil rights were violated
- e. The outcome or resolution the client is seeking
- f. Clear permission to use personal identifying information during the course of the investigation
  - i. If permission is denied, this DOES NOT withdraw or otherwise resolve the complaint

#### C. Acknowledgment of Civil Rights Complaints

1. Complaints are acknowledged by receipt within twenty (20) days per CDSS Guidelines. This acknowledgment will include information on the next steps and a timeline for resolution.

#### D. Investigation of the Complaint

1. Once the complaint is received, a thorough investigation may be conducted
2. This may include:
  - a. Reviewing documents, statements, and any evidence provided
  - b. Speaking with individuals involved in the incident
  - c. Reaching out to the complainant for additional information to ensure the department fully understands the issue

#### E. Resolution of the Complaint

1. After investigating the complaint, the appropriate action will be determined
2. Possible outcomes may include:
  - a. Correcting the situation or making policy changes
  - b. Offering an apology or benefit correction (if applicable)
  - c. Implementing changes to prevent future violations
3. A written response will be sent outlining the investigation's findings and any resolutions at the close of the investigation. Please see section G of this part for more information

#### F. Escalating the Complaint

1. If the client is not satisfied with the resolution, an escalation may occur.
2. To do this:
  - a. File complaints with external civil rights organizations or government agencies (such as the Civil Rights Section of the California Department of Social Services, contact information below)

#### G. Confidentiality

1. Client complaints and any personal information are kept confidential throughout the investigation process. Information is only shared as necessary to resolve the issue
2. Once an investigation is closed, the complaint and subsequent report shall be entered into the public record with the California Department of Social Services
3. Clients can request a copy of their report once it is entered into the public record
4. NOTE: All pertinent non-confidential information within a compiled complaint and report is subject to the public record. If allegations are substantiated, this may include:

- a. Non-identifying information (demographic information, welfare program history)
- b. Staff titles and positions
- c. Corrective actions

H. Additional Resources

1. For further assistance or to learn more about client civil rights, or to file with another agency, please contact the following:

- a. Federal:

U.S. Dept. of Health & Human Services  
ATTN: Office of Civil Rights  
200 Independence Avenue, S.W.  
Washington, DC 20201  
Toll Free: (800) 368-1019  
TDD: (800) 537-7697  
[OCRMail@hhs.gov](mailto:OCRMail@hhs.gov)

- b. State:

California Department of Social Services  
ATTN: Civil Rights Section  
744 P Street M/S 9-7-041  
Sacramento, CA 95814  
Phone: (916) 654-2107  
Toll free: (866)741-6241  
Email: [crb@dss.ca.gov](mailto:crb@dss.ca.gov)

Reference Materials:

- [CDSS Division 21 Manual](#)
- [CDSS GEN 1179 \(Complaint of Discrimination Form\)](#)
- [DSS Complaint Form](#)
- Mendocino County [Policy #16 Public Complaint](#)