



🔗 How You Can Help Prisoners

Donate to fund our work by visiting uplcchicago.org, or mailing a check.

Join United Voices for Prisoners:
(773) 362-4608.

Donate books to Chicago Books to Women in Prison:
chicagobwp@gmail.com.

Get an LGBTQ pen pal at blackandpink.org/pen-pals.

Encourage prisoners you know to write to us to share information about what is happening at their prison.

Prisoners Have Rights



🔗 Who We Are

Uptown People's Law Center is the only organization currently leveraging the law to improve prison conditions in Illinois. We also help people get Social Security disability benefits, and help tenants with landlord-tenant issues.

UPLC is located in the Uptown neighborhood of Chicago. We were founded in 1975 by former coal miners and their widows in an effort to secure black lung benefits for disabled coal miners.

We don't receive any money from state or federal governments. **UPLC relies on donations from individuals and foundations to do our work.**

Contact Us

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Prisoners' Rights Project

UPLC has been involved with prisoners' rights for over 30 years. **Illinois has one of the worst prison systems in the US, and is 73% over capacity.** Among other things, this means that prisoners are sometimes kept in dark basements that have raw sewage water coming up the drains, or forced to live in buildings that have broken windows covered in plywood.

UPLC has multiple class action lawsuits currently filed against the state of Illinois for unconstitutional prison conditions. **Our lawsuits will ultimately change the Illinois prison system for the better:** to improve the treatment prisoners with mental illness, who are sick, and have disabilities; to stop inhumane and illegal treatment of prisoners by guards; and to force the state to follow the law when reviewing prisoners for parole. UPLC works on broad issues to create lasting change that will help every Illinois prisoner.

UPLC does more than just file cases. An important part of our mission is to reeducate the public about prisons. We work with groups such as United Voices for Prisoners, Black and Pink, and Communities and Relatives of Illinois Incarcerated Children to increase our impact and better understand what families and prisoners need. Partnering with family members and numerous other supporters of prisoners, we give prisoners a voice on the outside of the walls.



An Example of our Work: “Nuts to Butts”

In our most recent case, we allege that hundreds of guards sexually humiliated, beat, and gratuitously destroyed the property of thousands of prisoners across southern Illinois during a series of mass shakedowns in the spring of 2014. Guards forced prisoners to stand in line so close to each other that each man's genitals were in contact with the next man's buttocks - referred to on the inside as “Nuts to Butts.” This sort of sexual humiliation and abuse was horrifying when it was uncovered in Abu Ghraib; it is equally horrifying that these techniques are used in Illinois' prisons and jails.

UPLC receives **over a hundred letters from prisoners a week**, and we compile and track the information sent to us. Tracking trends enables us to bring class action lawsuits to improve prison conditions. We don't seek monetary compensation for prisoners; we seek to change the system and stop the unjust, unconstitutional treatment of prisoners. UPLC has a small staff, and we partner with law firms in these cases to vastly increase our effectiveness.

We also strive to inform prisoners about programs available to help them upon release, such as anger management programs, Alcoholics/Narcotics Anonymous, and family developmental skills programs.



You Should Know

UPLC does not have any criminal attorneys. We don't practice criminal law, criminal appeals, post-convictions or habeas corpus petitions.

We can't speak to family members about any mail or conversations that we have with prisoners, unless we receive permission in writing from the prisoner directly. UPLC respects individual privacy and as legal professionals, anything we are told by prisoners is confidential unless they tell us otherwise.