

Noa Ryan
Database Design and Development
Prof. Monica Maceli
Fall 2024

Final Project Proposal:
Structuring Federal Bureau of Prisons' Administrative Remedy Program Data for Access

Between the nearly 24 years spanning January 2000 to May 2024, 1.78 million complaints or appeals were submitted to the Federal Bureau of Prisons' Administrative Remedy Program by people incarcerated in federal prisons across the United States. In 2024, the BOP responded to a 2022 FOIA request placed by the information activism initiative Data Liberation Project, providing the records related to these 1.78 million complaints to the group, whose members have worked to “reformat, clean, document, publish, and disseminate” the dataset for public access.

My final project, “Structuring Federal Bureau of Prisons' Administrative Remedy Program Data for Access,” will further streamline and structure this data for public use, facilitating easier access to specific information and subsets of the most relevant portions of the data for advocacy purposes. The intended users of this database are those typically considered stakeholders in the criminal legal system and related advocacy efforts: incarcerated people and their families/friends, lawyers and legal advocates, activists, and any combination of the preceding categories.

Information needs may include data on particular prisons, complaint subject codes, case numbers, or case status and the related “status reason” field (a brief encoded field corresponding to a preset list of possible rationales for a given case status). Many of the fields in the original dataset provided by the BOP are encoded, and my database would aim to replace or join encoded fields with their human-readable counterparts provided in separate tables in the FOIA request to aid in accessibility. Specific questions that users may have to answer using the database include:

1. How many complaints of a given subject code/category (i.e. 26T - TRANSGENDER CONCERNS/ISSUES) were filed from a given prison/“facility” (i.e. SCH - SCHUYLKILL FCI) during a given period of time (i.e. 2005-2010)?
2. How many separate submissions are associated with a single case number (CSNBR)?

3. How many requests / appeals were granted either partially or in full by a particular organizational level of submission (a compound designation comprised of Facility, Region, Agency) during a given period of time?
4. How many cases of a given subject code were denied or granted over a given period of time or by a particular organizational level of submission?
5. How many appeals were rejected on technical / administrative grounds (i.e. CPG - YOU DID NOT SUBMIT THE PROPER NUMBER OF CONTINUATION PAGES. YOU MUST SUBMIT ONE COPY AT THE WARDEN'S LEVEL; TWO COPIES AT THE REGIONAL DIRECTOR'S LEVEL; AND THREE COPIES AT THE CENTRAL OFFICE LEVEL.; FRM - YOU DID NOT SUBMIT YOUR REQUEST OR APPEAL ON THE PROPER FORM (BP-9, BP-10, BP-11).; or ENG - You may request staff assistance in preparing your request or appeal in English.) sorted by facility, organizational level of submission, time period, or case subject type?

Data includes the CSV formatted table containing entries by case, as well as supplementary tables, PDFs, and other data-dictionary-like sources breaking down the encoding systems from the main table. I aim to streamline the data so that encodings and their human-readable meanings are closer together in the database, either using associative entities or by joining the fields directly. While more data fields are included than the ones I have mentioned here, I aim to clean the data and structure the database according to the user questions I've outlined above, which will involve pruning many data fields from the dataset. Luckily, this is an openly available dataset with extensive documentation, so if my database doesn't provide the perfect experience for a user eventually, they will still have access to the unaltered data.

I've arrived at my user questions and this project through 4 years of experience working in legal advocacy in the criminal legal system where I've worked closely with incarcerated people, their families, advocates, lawyers, and the prison bureaucracy, as well as through conversations with my sibling who worked for two years as a paralegal in the federal public defender's office dealing directly with similar complaints and appeals from within the federal prison system. If I were to decide to continue refining this project after the course, I would conduct interviews with people I've worked with who represent the ideal users of this platform to further assess their needs and the "business rules" of how these different stakeholders engage with this data.

Sources

“The Data Liberation Project - Federal Inmate Complaints.” *Federal Inmate Complaints*, The Data Liberation Project, July 2024, www.data-liberation-project.org/datasets/federal-inmate-complaints/.