

# oppaga Progress Report



September 2002

Report No. 02-47

## Juvenile Home Detention Staff Reduced; Critical Secure Facility Posts Not Identified; Transit Changes Beneficial

### *at a glance*

Budget reductions made necessary by the state revenue shortfall eliminated employees that supervised youth on home detention. The Legislature continued funding for electronic monitoring of some home detention youth through a contract with a private provider. To date, judges have not sent more youth to secure detention centers as a result of these changes.

In 2000, we recommended that the Department of Juvenile Justice identify critical post staffing patterns for each secure detention facility to increase effectiveness and reduce high overtime, turnover, and training costs. The department has not implemented this recommendation. Because 159 positions were cut from secure detention facilities, it remains crucial that the department identify its staffing needs and optimize the allocation of staff.

Privatization of detention food services has reduced costs by 10%. Transportation has been streamlined to require fewer trips; as a result, costs have been reduced and staff should be spending more time “on the floor” supervising youth.

The department needs to improve the accuracy of the Juvenile Justice Information System.

### Purpose

In accordance with state law, this progress report informs the Legislature of actions taken by the Department of Juvenile Justice in response to findings and recommendations in our 2000 justification review.<sup>1,2</sup>

### Background

The primary purpose of detention is to ensure public safety while providing a short-term, safe environment for juveniles who are detained pending legal action. The detention program supervises youth who have been

- charged with a crime but have not been before a judge to be found innocent or guilty;
- found guilty but have not yet been sentenced; and
- sentenced but are waiting for beds to become available in the juvenile justice commitment facility to which they have been assigned.

<sup>1</sup> Section 11.45(7)(f), *Florida Statutes*.

<sup>2</sup> *Justification Review: Juvenile Detention Program's Performance Improved; Staffing Needs to Be Revisited*, OPPAGA [Report No. 99-45](#), April 2000.

Judges determine whether to assign youth to detention by the nature of the youth's current offense and the level of risk he/she is considered to pose to society. The department operates 25 secure detention centers throughout the state.<sup>3</sup>

## Prior Findings

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In our 2000 justification review, we made several recommendations to improve department efficiency.

### *Home Detention*

The department's recommended 7:1 youth-to-staff ratio for home detention did not reflect current caseloads and conditions.

- We recommended that the department determine actual home detention caseloads, develop a more meaningful staffing standard, and use this standard to allocate staff.

### *Secure Detention*

Outdated staffing patterns and high turnover limited the efficiency of secure detention and contributed to high overtime and training costs.<sup>4</sup>

- We recommended that the department develop a critical post-staffing pattern, similar to those used by the Department of Corrections, for each secure detention facility. The staffing patterns should take into account each facility's building design and level of technology.
- We also recommended that the department use this information to develop an optimal distribution of

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<sup>3</sup> The Legislature has directed the department to outsource operations for one detention center starting January 1, 2003.

<sup>4</sup> The turnover of detention care workers was among the 10 highest in the entire state personnel system. While separation from state government statewide was 13%, detention care workers left the state workforce at the rate of 26% in 1998.

secure detention staff throughout the state.

We found that job responsibilities such as transporting youth frequently took staff from the detention centers, leaving fewer workers to supervise youth. The staff-to-youth ratio was further reduced when staff performed kitchen, laundry, clerical, and procurement jobs. While workers did these jobs they were not able to supervise youth "on the floor."

- We recommended that the department identify jobs, such as kitchen and laundry work, that could be done by less costly staff who would not be responsible for supervising youth.

### *Program Accountability*

The program's performance measures directly addressed the primary purpose of detention and had the potential to provide relevant and useful information to evaluate program effectiveness. However, the department's inspector general identified a number of concerns regarding the accuracy and consistency of the performance measure data.

- The inspector general recommended that the department develop and implement a data control and reporting system to ensure the reliability of the reported performance measures. We concurred with this recommendation.

## New Developments

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**Budget cuts made necessary by the state revenue shortfall eliminated staff supervision of youth in home detention.** Youth on home detention are released to the physical custody of a responsible parent or adult. These youth are not allowed to leave their residences without supervision unless it is for an approved reason, such as to attend school or go to a job. Prior to the 2002 budget cuts, department staff made periodic face-to-face and telephone contact

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with the youth to check on their whereabouts, determine if they were abiding by the rules of their home detention contracts, and facilitate their appearance at court hearings. The department also used electronic monitoring for approximately one-third of youth on home detention. The department reports that in Fiscal Year 2000-01, 29,647 youth were placed on home detention.<sup>5</sup>

Due to revenue shortfalls, the Legislature eliminated all home detention positions in 2002.<sup>6</sup> Although juveniles on home detention are no longer supervised in the field, judges may still place youth on home detention, and may specify that youth on home detention be electronically monitored. The department has continued its contract with a private provider for electronic monitoring of youth through radio frequency and voice verification checks. If the monitoring devices indicate that youth are not where they are supposed to be, department probation officers investigate.

The decrease in supervision of youth on home detention has not led judges to place more youth in secure detention. In fact, the number of youth on both home and secure detention during the first six months of 2002 decreased from the number on detention the first six months of 2001, as shown in Exhibit 1.

**Exhibit 1**  
**Youth on Detention Have Decreased**

	Secure Detention	Home Detention
January- June 2001	21,046	15,284
January- June 2002	20,685	12,867

Source: Department of Juvenile Justice data.

<sup>5</sup> *Department of Juvenile Justice Long-Range Program Plan for Fiscal Year 2002-03 through 2006-07 (Legislative Version)*, November 23, 2001, page 13.

<sup>6</sup> The Legislature had planned to outsource 173 home detention positions, and retain 6 department positions. However, in Special Session C, due to the budget shortfall, it eliminated all home detention positions.

Department staff reports that there are several reasons for this reduction, including

- the department has added residential beds, so youth who have been sentenced are not staying in detention while they wait for a bed to open for them at the residential program they are being sent to;
- the length of stay at residential programs for chronic offenders has gotten longer, so these youth are not out committing new crimes again and cycling back through detention as frequently; and
- judges are not revoking youth on home detention and sending them to secure detention as frequently. Prior to elimination of home detention supervisors, judges may have received more reports of home detention violations, which resulted in revocations.

**The department has not implemented our recommendation to develop a critical post staffing policy for secure detention.** Given that 159 positions were eliminated from secure detention due to budget shortfalls, it remains crucial that the department identifies critical post staffing needs for the secure detention centers and optimizes the distribution of staff.<sup>7</sup>

**Food service has been privatized.** Food service for secure detention centers has been privatized, realizing a 10% reduction in costs. The department also sought to privatize maintenance of the secure detention facilities, but was not able to obtain a provider at the price authorized in the department's legislative appropriation.

<sup>7</sup> The eliminated positions included 26 at the Monroe County Detention Center, 12 assistant superintendents associated with food services, and 115.5 from eliminating consequence units.

**The Statewide Transportation Offender Program reduces costs and allows staff to spend more time on the floor supervising youth.**

The new transportation system, which uses transportation hubs and routing software, has reduced costs through consolidating trips, thereby requiring fewer vehicles, fewer travel miles, and less officer time. The department reduced the average cost to transport a youth from \$97 in Fiscal Year 1999-2001 to \$25.69 for January through June 2002. The department reports that officers are spending fewer hours on the road and are available to spend more time supervising youth.

**More work is needed before performance measure data from the Juvenile Justice Information System will be reliable.**

In April 2002, the Auditor General found that the department was unable to ensure the

integrity of the data maintained in the Juvenile Justice Information System.<sup>8</sup> The department uses data from this system to report percentage of youth who remain crime-free while in secure detention; percentage of successful completions without committing a new law or contract violation, failure to appear, and abscond, or contempt of court for home detention; and average daily population and number of admissions for home and secure detention. The department has convened a workgroup to address JJIS issues.

The accuracy of JJIS data has been a concern to program staff, the department's inspector general, the Auditor General, OPPAGA, and the Legislature. It is critical that the department address data issues so that the system will produce reliable data.

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<sup>8</sup> *Department of Juvenile Justice Juvenile Justice Information System: Information Technology Audit for the Period July 2001 through October 2001, and Selected Department Actions Taken through February 2002*, Florida Auditor General [Report No. 02-194](#), April 2002, page 3.

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