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Information Brief



December 2003

Report No. 03-74

Juvenile Bed Tracking System Improves; Bed Vacancy Rates High for Some Programs

at a glance

The Department of Juvenile Justice has modified its bed management system and its residential commitment bed count is now reasonably accurate. Accurate counts of available beds are essential for managing the placement of juvenile offenders, informing the courts of available placements, and advising the Legislature of program needs.

The department's overall vacancy rate for its residential commitment programs ranged from 5.4% to 9.8% during the last 12 months. However, some program types—boot camps and low risk programs for males—had relatively high vacancy rates of up to 34.7%. The department should reduce beds in programs that have consistently high vacancy rates in order to maximize the use of state funds.

Scope -----

Section 4, Ch. 2003-397, *Laws of Florida*, directs the Office of Program Policy Analysis and Government Accountability to conduct an analysis of Department of Juvenile Justice's use of residential commitment beds, including the number of beds operated by the department, the vacancy rate of these beds, and the department's process for tracking capacity and utilization.

Background -----

The Florida Department of Juvenile Justice provides a continuum of services for juvenile offenders, including residential commitment programs. These programs provide 24-hour supervision of serious juvenile offenders. Although the department operates some residential programs, 87% are operated by private providers under contract with the department. In Fiscal Year 2002-03, the Legislature appropriated \$289 million for residential commitment services.

Accurate bed counts are essential for managing the placement of juveniles in the department's custody. The department also needs reliable counts to provide accurate and timely information to the courts about available placements and to the Legislature for assessing current and future bed needs.

Legislative concern for the accuracy of information provided by the Department of Juvenile Justice prompted a proviso in the Appropriation Act of 2001 requiring the department to modify the Juvenile Justice Information System (JJIS) to improve bed management.¹

In 2001 the Auditor General conducted an on-site bed count as part of an operational audit of the department. The report noted that JJIS understated the number of beds available in the department's residential commitment programs.² The department completed system revisions in August 2002.

To analyze the current accuracy of JJIS bed counts, OPPAGA and Auditor General staff traveled to each of the department's 157 commitment facilities on September 10, 2003, to count the number of available and occupied beds and compare our findings with JJIS data.³

Findings-----

JJIS bed counts are now reasonably accurate

Our September 10, 2003, inventory of residential program beds determined that the department's bed counts were reasonably accurate. During our field visits we counted 7,016 contracted and state-operated beds in residential facilities. The department's bed management system (JJIS) also showed 7,016 beds for that day. However, we found that for a small number (37) of contracted beds, the number of beds recorded in JJIS did not agree with the number of beds found in individual programs. In each instance, these beds had been moved from a program at one location to another location operated by the same provider, but the change had not been made in JJIS. According to the department, some beds

were being shifted between programs in anticipation of signing a new contract or amending an existing contract. The department updates the JJIS to reflect such changes upon the implementation of the new contract.

During our bed count we noted that it was common for many programs to maintain extra beds beyond the number that were contracted. We identified 175 of these additional beds in 37 programs. Programs maintained extra beds for several reasons. In one case, the program had 62 extra beds in anticipation of a possible additional contract. Most programs had one to four extra beds that they use to isolate youth for problem behavior, provide flexibility in housing sex offenders separately from other youth at night, or serve over-capacity placements.

To help assure efficient use of beds, the department initiated a policy in November 2001 that a youth's bed is released when the youth is sent to detention and is gone for more than 48 hours.⁴ If the youth returns to the same program, the program is required to accept the youth, and the extra beds are used for the occasional short-term need that arises as a result of this policy.

Bed vacancy rates vary by program type

The overall vacancy rate for residential programs on the day of our field visits was 5.8%. In JJIS, 6,571 youth were reported as placed in residential programs on that day. Data collected by auditors showed 6,608 youth placed in programs that day, a difference of less than 1%. Daily admissions and releases may result in small differences in youth counts at different times of day. Thus, we concluded that the JJIS provided the department with reasonably accurate information on vacancies for management decisions.

It is important for the department to maintain a reasonably low vacancy level in its residential commitment programs. The key to a reasonable vacancy level is that there needs to be enough beds to serve surges in

¹ Proviso was developed in response to *Department of Juvenile Justice Fixed Assets Management*, Auditor General [Report No. 01-060](#), November 2000.

² *Fixed Capital Outlay Appropriations and Contracted Services for Beds; Florida Department of Juvenile Justice Operational Audit*, Auditor General [Report No. 02-057](#), October 2001.

³ A single bed is counted as one standard bed and a bunk bed is counted as two standard beds. Makeshift beds (e.g., cots, rollout beds, mattresses, and sofas) are not counted as standard beds.

⁴ Youth sometimes leave the program to appear before the court on other charges, and are housed at detention centers near the court.

commitments without undue expense during periods of lower population. Most residential programs now have contracts with a reduction in the per diem rate up to \$10 per each vacant bed.⁵ Programs such as boot camps that are not competitively bid receive a set per diem whether or not the bed is filled. As a result, the state pays most or all of the cost of unfilled beds.

The department reports that overall vacancy rates ranged from 5.4% to 9.8% from October 2002 to October of 2003. In our analysis of program vacancy rates on September 10, rates varied considerably by program type, as shown in Exhibit 1.⁶ Low vacancy rates for sex offender and substance abuse special need program beds indicate strong demand for these programs.

Vacancy rates exceeded 15% for three program types—boot camps, the maximum risk program for females, and low risk programs for male offenders. Boot camps, which are operated by sheriffs, have the highest vacancy rate of 34.7%, and 4 of the 11 individual boot camps had vacancy rates over 50%. Boot camps typically have higher vacancy rates because they admit only youth from their home county and have strict admission criteria in regard to medical conditions. Boot camps also do not generally provide mental health treatment services.

Florida has only one female maximum risk program, the Florida Institute for Girls, and it has 24 contracted beds. Admissions to the program were recently suspended by the department due to incidents regarding the restraint of youth. Until the suspension is lifted, the vacancy rate does not accurately reflect demand for these program services and should not be used to assess bed needs.

The relatively high vacancy rate in male low risk programs is surprising because more youth are being admitted to residential programs for

non-law violations of probation and might be expected to be placed in low risk programs. However, our analysis shows that most youth admitted for non-law violations of probation are placed in moderate risk programs.

Exhibit 1
Vacancy Rates Vary by Program Type

Program Type	Number of Programs	Number of Beds	Beds Filled	Vacancy Rate
Boot Camp	11	320	209	34.7%
Female				
Maximum Risk	1	24	18	25.0%
Male Low Risk	16	445	360	19.1%
Female Low Risk	6	119	109	8.4%
Developmentally Disabled	1	29	27	6.9%
Male High Risk	20	1235	1156	6.4%
Male				
Maximum Risk	3	146	139	4.8%
Female				
Mental Health	7	294	280	4.8%
Female				
Moderate Risk	15	562	535	4.8%
Male Moderate Risk	53	2,606	2,545	2.3%
Male Mental Health	5	268	265	1.1%
Female High Risk	4	190	189	0.5%
Sex Offender	9	468	466	0.4%
Female				
Substance Abuse	1	20	20	0.0%
Male				
Substance Abuse	5	290	290	0.0%
Total	157	7,016	6,608	5.8%

Source: OPPAGA/Auditor General survey of DJJ residential programs.

The high vacancy rate for male low risk programs may reflect the demand for special needs treatment services, which are concentrated in moderate and high risk programs. For example, judges sometimes commit youth so that they will receive treatment services.

As shown in Exhibit 2, only 5 of the 16 male low risk programs receive overlay funding to provide special needs services.⁷ Within the group of male low risk programs, those providing overlay services had a vacancy rate

⁵ Per diem reduction is based on reduction estimates of non-salary program costs including food, utilities, and hygiene items.

⁶ We calculated the vacancy rate based on current placements divided by operating capacity. The department calculates a usage rate that also includes beds reserved for youth that are not yet admitted to the program.

⁷ Low risk programs are reimbursed for Behavioral Health Overlay Services (BHOS) such as mental health and substance abuse treatment through the federal Medicaid program.

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of 6.5%, while those not offering overlay services had a vacancy rate of 25.8%. Female low risk programs exhibited a similar pattern.

Exhibit 2

Male Low Risk Programs That Do Not Provide Overlay Services have Higher Vacancy Rates

Type of Male Low Risk Program	Number of Programs	Number of Beds	Vacancy Rate
Program receiving overlay funding for special needs services	5	154	6.5%
Program not receiving overlay funding for special needs services	11	291	25.8%
All male low risk programs	16	445	19.1%

Source: OPPAGA/Auditor General survey of DJJ residential programs.

Although our analysis is based on one day's vacancies, the department's data on the length of time that youth wait to be placed in programs corroborates the high demand for programs offering treatment services. Youth wait longer to be placed in programs with treatment services. The longer wait for placement is an additional indicator of the low vacancy rates of these programs.

In its Fiscal Year 2004-05 legislative budget request, the department is proposing to eliminate 115 low or moderate risk commitment beds. In our analysis of vacancy rates on September 10, the variation within low risk programs indicates that the beds that are not being used are those without treatment services. Low risk beds with treatment services and moderate risk beds, most of which have treatment services, did not have high vacancy rates. Therefore, the department should give priority to closing low risk beds that are not funded to provide treatment services.

Although not identified in the budget proposal, the department should also consider reducing the number of beds in boot camp programs that have consistently high vacancy rates.

Conclusions-----

The Department of Juvenile Justice has modified its bed management system and its residential commitment bed count is now reasonably accurate.

The overall vacancy rate in DJJ commitment programs ranged from 5.4% to 9.8% during the past 12 months. However, in our analysis of vacancy rates on September 10, various program types exhibited a wide range of rates, from 0% to 34.7%. The department should reduce beds in programs that have consistently high vacancy rates in order to maximize use of state funds. The department should give priority to reducing the number of low risk beds that do not have associated treatment services and have consistently high vacancies. The high vacancy rate that we found on September 10 suggests that the department should also consider reducing the number of boot camp beds. These reductions will help reduce costs and improve the overall vacancy rate for residential services.

Agency Response-----

In accordance with the provisions of s. 11.45(7)(d), *Florida Statutes*, a draft of our report was submitted to the Secretary of the Department of Juvenile Justice for review and response. The Secretary's written response is included in Appendix A.

Appendix A



FLORIDA DEPARTMENT OF JUVENILE JUSTICE
Governor Jeb Bush
Secretary W.G. "Bill" Bankhead

December 18, 2003

Mr. John W. Turcotte, Director
Office of Program Policy Analysis and Government Accountability
Claude Pepper Building, Room 312
111 W. Madison Street
Tallahassee, Florida 32399-1475

Dear Mr. Turcotte:

Crucial to the department's use of residential commitment beds, the Juvenile Justice Bed Management Information System, is a complex system, which assists in managing the residential continuum of programming and services. The audit conducted in this Review analyzed the department's use of residential commitment beds, which included the number of beds operated, vacancy rates and the processes used for tracking capacities and utilization.

Pursuant to Section 11.513(3), Florida Statutes, we have provided a written explanation concerning all of the recommendations for the Special Review of the Department of Juvenile Justice use of residential commitment beds.

"The department should reduce beds in programs that have consistently high vacancy rates in order to maximize use of state funds."

When programs are identified as having consistent underutilization rates, the department has been proactive in reducing and reallocating those beds to other program types and restrictiveness levels to meet the continuum of treatment and public safety needs as identified through the JJIS bed management system. This results in continuing maximization of funds while providing additional services in crucial areas such as mental health and substance abuse programming, while increasing overall utilization rates.

"The department should give priority to reducing the number of low risk beds that do not have associated treatment services and have consistently high vacancies."

As noted in the 2004-2005 legislative budget requests, the department has proposed eliminating 115 non-secure beds. Various factors will be examined; including utilization rates, to determine which beds will be affected within the non-secure entity.

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"The department should also consider reducing the number of boot camp beds."

Boot camps, with the concept of paramilitary programming, are unique in the type of youth served, who must meet strict mental health and physical parameters. The department continues to work with boot camp providers and regional staff to increase overall utilization within boot camps. Admissions to boot camps are in the form of a platoon system with 15 youth entering the camp as a new platoon. Youth are assigned to a platoon and await the graduation of a platoon, before a new platoon enters. Thus, vacancies at the camps aren't filled as they occur, but are filled, as platoons are ready. Discussions have been held with the various Sheriffs, who operated the camps, to open admissions outside of the 15 youth platoon system, admit smaller platoons of seven youth, stagger the platoon admissions and to expand the referral area for admissions.

We will pursue all the recommendations identified in this analysis to improve our residential continuum. Should you need further information, please contact Charles Chervanik, Assistant Secretary for Residential and Correctional Facilities at 921-4188 or Richard Kline, Director of Programming and Policy at (850) 921-6294.

Cordially,

/s/
W.G. "Bill" Bankhead
Secretary

WGB/CRC/dd

Cc: Charles R. Chervanik, Assistant Secretary for
Residential and Correctional Facilities
Richard Kline, Director of Programming and Policy

The Florida Legislature

Office of Program Policy Analysis and Government Accountability



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- [Best Financial Management Practices Reviews of Florida school districts](#). In accordance with the *Sharpening the Pencil Act*, OPPAGA and the Auditor General jointly conduct reviews to determine if a school district is using best financial management practices to help school districts meet the challenge of educating their students in a cost-efficient manner.

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