



Office of Program Policy Analysis And Government Accountability



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Follow-Up Report on the Inmate Intake Process Administered by the Department of Corrections

Abstract

The Department of Corrections has taken positive steps to address our recommendations. The agency implemented automation systems to improve the quantity and quality of information available to staff about individual inmates. Staff can use the information initially to determine individual inmate needs and subsequently to determine the extent to which those needs are being met. Also, although not fully implemented, the agency is developing a risk and needs assessment process to determine both inmate placement needs and Department planning needs.

Purpose

In accordance with s. 11.45(7)(f), F.S., this follow-up report informs the Legislature of actions taken by the Department of Corrections in response to our Report No. 94-26, which we issued January 9, 1995. This report presents our assessment of the extent to which the Department has addressed the findings and recommendations included in our report.

Background

The Department of Corrections uses the inmate intake process to assess each convicted felon received into its custody. Staff classify inmates to protect the security and order of the institution and to protect the public. The assessment should also determine inmate needs for Department programs and activities. The inmate intake process is used to determine custody and supervision levels as well as program activity areas such as

institutional assignment, academic and vocational education, work areas, counseling, drug and alcohol abuse treatment, community release, and furloughs.

The Department conducts the intake process at five reception centers. In fiscal year 1995-96, the Department admitted almost 26,000 inmates. It spent approximately \$21,164,000, or an average of \$814 per inmate, for the intake process.

Prior Findings

Our report recommended that the Department of Corrections use information gathered during the intake process to improve inmate program recommendations and agency program planning. Specifically, the Department should:

- Establish performance measures and benchmarks to measure and evaluate the effectiveness of the intake process.
- Establish procedures for recommending program assignments to help reduce criminal behavior.
- Develop and use a systematic needs assessment plan to provide programs and rehabilitative services to reduce recommitment.
- Require the use of investigative information, such as post-sentence information, to make meaningful program recommendations.

Current Status

The Department is relying on the development of an inmate needs and risk assessment system to address three of the four Office of Program Policy Analysis and Government Accountability recommendations to improve inmate intake. In May of 1995, the Department entered into a contract with the University of North Florida to develop an instrument to serve as the basis for a risk and needs assessment system. The system, which will utilize collected data to help establish program performance measures and benchmarks, is presently in the early stages of being piloted. If the instrument proves successful, the Department will automate the system. The Department did not address OPPAGA's recommendation to require the use of investigative information, such as post-sentence information, to improve the program recommendation process.

Actions Taken

Performance Measures/Benchmarks. The Department has developed two automated systems to better capture and retain inmate intake data: the Computer Assisted Reception Process (CARP) and the Inmate Management/Offender Tracking System. These systems should provide sufficient information to establish baseline data to help identify benchmarks and meet other performance measurement needs. Furthermore, the systems should assist in establishing a framework to reassess inmates' status throughout incarceration and allow staff to better manage beds and track high-risk inmates.

CARP is useful to the Department in streamlining the reception process by collecting information more effectively and enabling intake staff to make initial placement decisions and recommendations. Though the CARP system is purged when inmates transfer to a permanent correctional facility, some of the information, such as sentence, financial and victim

information, and physical characteristics, is transferred to the Inmate Management/Offender Tracking System for use beyond the reception process.

The Department intends to maintain and update the Inmate Management/Offender Tracking System data to develop a complete "picture" of an inmate from reception, reduce overall duplication of information and services, and better identify and plan program needs.

Department staff were also surveyed in 1996 to gather ideas and suggestions regarding the best intake measurements and benchmarks with the goal of identifying major key quality indicators for study by July 1997.

Program Assignment Procedures. The Department states that the inmate risk and needs assessment instrument will help with placement decisions and assist in assessing inmate needs in the areas of academic and vocational education, treatment programs, special housing, and security needs.

Systematic Needs Assessment Plan. The Department plans to use the risk and needs assessment instrument and anticipated resulting information as the basis for prioritizing and sequencing inmates through a treatment plan followed from reception to release. This information will also provide a basis for determining systemwide program needs.

Actions Not Taken

Use of Post-Sentence Investigations. The Department states that it attempts to process post-sentence investigations as expeditiously as possible, but has not taken steps to ensure that this information is received prior to intake recommendations being made. As a result, useful information about the inmate's family, work history, or criminal offense may not be considered when making program placement recommendations.

This project was conducted in accordance with applicable evaluation standards. Copies of this report may be obtained by telephone (904/488-1023 or 800/531-2477), by FAX (904/487-3804), in person (Claude Pepper Building, Room 312, 111 W. Madison St.), or by mail (OPPAGA Report Production, P.O. Box 1735, Tallahassee, FL 32302).

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