



Office of Program Policy Analysis And Government Accountability



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Follow-Up Report on the Juvenile Alternative Services Program Administered by the Department of Juvenile Justice

Abstract

- The Department of Juvenile Justice has taken steps to direct more appropriate youth to the Juvenile Alternative Services Program (JASP). However, the Program is still not diverting the intended population from the court system and more expensive delinquency programs;
- The use of expensive court and delinquency program resources for youth who have committed lesser crimes is unnecessary and reduces the availability of these resources for youth involved in more serious crime;
- To solve this problem, the Legislature or the Department should define by statute or rule admission criteria for JASP, or the Program should be eliminated.

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 Juvenile Justice in response to our Report No. 12293, issued May 10, 1994. This report presents our assessment of the extent to which the Department has addressed our findings and recommendations.

Background

The Juvenile Alternative Services Program (JASP) is intended to hold delinquent youth accountable for their actions while easing the burden on the juvenile justice system. The Department of Juvenile Justice designed JASP to reduce the number of delinquent youth sent to court and placed in more intensive and costly programs, such as Community Control.

When delinquent youth are arrested, the Department screens them to determine their risk to the community and their treatment needs. The Department recommends to the state attorneys whether the youth are appropriate for diversion to non-judicial programs such as JASP. The state attorneys make the final determination.

To be diverted to JASP, youth must agree to participate in the program and waive their right to a speedy trial. Once in JASP, youth are required to complete assigned sanctions, such as performing community service and paying victim restitution. Youth may also be required to participate in activities such as family counseling or substance abuse treatment. Youth who complete their sanctions can avoid being adjudicated delinquent, while youth who do not may be sent to court and placed in the Community Control Program.

Prior Findings

We found that JASP frequently was not used to divert youth from the court system and the Community Control Program. Eighty percent of the youth in our sample referred to JASP did not meet the Department's criteria for Community Control: they were less serious offenders. One reason for inappropriate referrals may have been that the Department had not developed rules or guidelines to describe the types of youth who should be served. Another was that state attorneys often did not use or did not wait for the Department's recommendations on whether to divert youth. We also found that over 10% of the youth placed in JASP came into the Program as a result of court action.

Because 80% of the youth who were referred to JASP had committed less serious crimes than those who are intended to participate in the program, evaluations of JASP's effectiveness may be misleading. Studies show that the majority of these youth may not need to receive state sanctions or services to deter them from engaging in future delinquent behavior.

The allocation of \$5 million to JASP programs, coupled with the use of expensive court resources, is unnecessary for youth who have committed lesser crimes and reduces the availability of these resources for cases involving more serious crime.

Current Status

While the Department has followed many of our recommendations and made several efforts to direct JASP to the intended population, JASP is still serving youth with lesser offenses rather than diverting youth from the Community Control Program. According to the Department's Quality Assurance Report, issued in February 1997, JASP is not serving the population it was intended to divert. According to Department statistics, the number of cases referred to JASP dropped 17% over the past five years, while the number of cases disposed to Community Control rose 32% until last year, when it fell 5% .

The Quality Assurance report also notes that many JASP cases are referred by the court, in direct conflict with the model's intent.

Actions Taken

The Department has made several efforts to direct appropriate youth to JASP, including:

- Training Department staff and others on admission criteria;
- Including admission criteria in its new Intervention Manual;
- Working with state attorneys, judges, public defenders, and JASP providers to discuss and develop cooperative agreements regarding admission criteria; and
- Directing Department Quality Assurance staff to report compliance with admission standards.

The Department has also redesigned its program exit form to obtain more information about the services each youth receives while in JASP, and begun to collect recidivism data on JASP youth. The Department reports that all districts have also reviewed the intake process to identify and address problems that cause delays.

Actions Not Taken

To better ensure that the resources used for JASP best meet juvenile justice needs, we recommend that either admission criteria for JASP be specified by the Department by rule or by the Legislature in statute or the Legislature discontinue funding the program

This project was conducted in accordance with applicable evaluation standards. Copies of this report may be obtained by telephone (850/488-0021 or 800/531-2477), by FAX (850/487-3804), in person (Claude Pepper Building, Room 312, 111 W. Madison St.), or by mail (OPPAGA Report Production, P.O. Box 1735, Tallahassee, FL 32302). Web site: <http://www.state.fl.us/oppaga/>

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