



# Office of Program Policy Analysis And Government Accountability



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## Follow-Up Report on the Aftercare Program Administered by the Department of Juvenile Justice

### Abstract

- The Legislature has directed the Department of Juvenile Justice and the Juvenile Justice Advisory Board to conduct a study of Aftercare, due December 1998. The study will address many of the issues raised in our report, including identifying which aftercare models are most effective.
- The Department should include in this study short tune-up programs for youth who do not comply with aftercare rules to determine if these programs are a cost-effective deterrent to crime.
- The Department is requesting funding for 50 transitional independent living beds for aftercare youth who cannot return home. At \$75 per day, the annual cost of these beds will be approximately \$1.4 million. If funded, these beds should enhance public safety by providing assistance to youth coming out of commitment who have no viable place to go.

### Purpose

In accordance with s. 11.45(7)(f), F.S., this follow-up report informs the Legislature of actions the Department of Juvenile Justice took in response to Report No. 95-38, issued February 27, 1996. This report presents our assessment of the extent to which the Department has addressed our recommendations.

### Background

Chapter 985, F.S., directs the Department of Juvenile Justice to provide aftercare to all youth released from residential commitment. The purpose of aftercare is to prevent recidivism of these youth by providing supervision and services to help them make a successful transition back into the community.

### Prior Findings

#### Rural Youth

In most rural counties, aftercare youth were under-served because there were fewer ancillary services and contracted aftercare providers were not available. Services were provided primarily by Department case managers whose caseloads ranged from 50 to 70 youth. One way the Department could provide adequate supervision of rural aftercare youth would be to supplement case managers with trackers to monitor youth. Trackers are less expensive than case managers.

#### Noncompliant Youth

Youth who did not comply with aftercare program rules were usually not sanctioned until they became habitually noncompliant; then they were sometimes ordered to go through a residential program again. Research indicates that short "tune-up" programs, which are much less costly, may be more effective. The Department should determine if short tune-up programs are an effective deterrent to recidivism.

## Independent Living

A number of youth were unable to return home due to their families' unwillingness or inability to care for them. To better ensure public safety, independent living programs may be critical for youth coming out of residential commitment who have no viable place to go. The Department needed to assess whether residential independent living programs should be developed for high-need aftercare and post-commitment youth.

## Program Success

The Department did not know how to best extend and reinforce the effects of its residential programs to reduce recidivism. The Department needed to identify which aftercare models work best. Program evaluation was limited because there was not enough information about participants, services, and costs to interpret program outcomes and identify successful program features.

## Budget Requests

The Department had not determined how long youth should stay in aftercare, which hindered budget planning. How long youth stay in aftercare affects the number of aftercare slots that are needed. If a program's length of stay is six months, 100 slots can serve up to 200 youth per year; if the length of stay is three months, those slots can serve 400 youth in the same period. To better project how many aftercare slots are necessary, the Department needed to determine the optimal length of time youth should spend in aftercare to avoid recidivism. Also, the Department needed to link budget requests for commitment beds to requests for corresponding aftercare slots.

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## Current Status

### Actions Taken

The Department and the Juvenile Justice Advisory Board are conducting a study to determine which aftercare models are most effective. The Department reports that the study will address several critical issues raised in our prior report, including:

- What treatment models are currently used;

- How long aftercare should last; and
- The need for more information, such as participant histories and services provided at each aftercare program.

To better identify aftercare costs, the Department has established unique SAMAS codes for each program. This information will be useful for comparing the relative costs of aftercare programs.

To enhance public safety and address the needs of youth who cannot return home upon release from residential commitment, the Department is requesting funding for 50 slots for transitional independent living.

Department staff are also assessing the potential impact of using trackers to assist case managers to provide adequate supervision of aftercare youth in rural areas.

The Department's budget request now links new commitment beds to additional aftercare slots. Combining these requests provides the Legislature more complete information about how budget allocations affect the Department's continuum of care.

### Actions Needed

The Department reports that current staff funding will not support the assessment of short tune-up programs for youth who do not comply with aftercare rules. However, removing youth from the community before they become habitually noncompliant or re-offend enhances public safety and is considered by experts to be an important feature of effective aftercare.

Research indicates that short tune-up programs may be more effective than recommitment. They are also cheaper. At \$75 per day per youth, a stay in a five-day tune-up program would cost \$375; six months in a level 6 program would cost \$13,500.

We recommend that the Department's aftercare study include an assessment of short tune-up programs for noncompliant aftercare youth to determine if these programs are an effective deterrent to crime.

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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