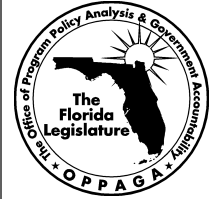




Office of Program Policy Analysis And Government Accountability



John W. Turcotte, Director

February 1998

Follow-Up Report on the Inmate Idleness Reduction Activities Administered by the Department of Corrections

Abstract

- **The Department of Corrections and the Legislature have taken positive steps to better manage the inmate population. The department increased the number of full-time work and self-improvement program assignments. However, the department did not have full-time work or program assignments for 15% of the available inmate population.**
- **The department should continue its efforts to provide additional work and self-improvement opportunities for inmates. The department should also continue to implement strategies that keep inmates occupied during times when they are not participating in work or self-improvement activities.**

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. 95-27, issued January 8, 1996. This report presents our assessment of the extent to which the department has addressed our findings and recommendations.

Background

Reducing inmate idleness is in the state's best interest because inmates who are not kept busy pose a security threat to the prison's internal operations as well as to public safety. As defined in OPPAGA Report No. 95-27, inmate idleness refers to those unrestricted times during the day when inmates are not working or participating in self-improvement activities, such as academic, vocational, and substance abuse programs.

Prior Findings

Our earlier study found that the department had the capacity, as of September 12, 1995, to provide full-time work assignments and full-time self-improvement program assignments to only 61% and 16%, of the available inmate population, respectively. Due to the limited availability of full-time work or program assignments, many inmates spent much of their time either engaged in recreational activities or participating in unstructured activities.

We identified six strategies that the department could use to further reduce inmate idleness:

- expanding the use of armed work squads;
- revising current law to encourage expansion of prison industries;
- increasing efforts to recruit businesses to establish work programs;
- creating "non-work" or "make-work" alternatives, such as drills, calisthenics, or rock-breaking;

- expanding academic, vocational, and substance abuse programs; and
- expanding efforts to recruit volunteers for evening and weekend hours.

However, additional funding would be needed to implement these strategies. Other impediments to department efforts to provide additional work and self-improvement opportunities for inmates include physical space limitations, security constraints, and statutory restrictions on the types of correctional work programs that can be implemented and on the types of inmates that can be assigned to inmate work programs.

Another policy that adversely affected Department efforts to manage inmate idleness was the use of open bay dormitories rather than single- or double-cell housing. Inmates without full-time work assignments could be more easily confined during the day in a cell rather than a dormitory.

Current Status

The department and the Legislature have taken positive steps to better manage the inmate population. As of June 30, 1997, the department had the capacity to provide full-time work assignments and full-time self-improvement program assignments to 68% and 17% of the available inmate population, respectively. Although an improvement over 1995 levels, there were still 7,595 inmates (or approximately 15% of available inmates statewide) who did not have either a full-time work or program assignment.

Strategies being implemented with success. From September 12, 1995, through June 30, 1997, the department added 3,336 full-time workstations and 517 full-time self-improvement program assignment slots. In addition, the department expanded the number of self-betterment and faith-based programs available to inmates primarily during evening and weekend hours.

Furthermore, the department has made progress towards increasing secure type housing for the incarcerated population. For example, of the 5,425 beds added from January 1, 1996, through June 30, 1997, 76% were secure-cell housing and 24% were the non-secure type. Increasing the ratio of secure versus non-secure type housing enhances the department's ability to better manage inmates.

Strategies being implemented with limited success.

The department has been slow to expand the use of armed work squads and to establish new Private Sector/Prison Industry Enhancement (PIE) projects. The department has concerns related to the location and type of work that can be done by armed work squads and the relatively high staff to inmate ratio and low productivity for armed work squads. While the department has approved three new PIE projects since January 1996, fewer than 20 inmates have been employed in these projects. The PIE projects involve partnerships between the department and private sector companies in which inmate labor is used to produce goods that are sold through interstate commerce.

Strategies not being fully implemented. In our prior report, we recommended that the department consider assigning inmates to activities that do not keep them constructively busy but serve the purpose of keeping inmates occupied, such as drills, calisthenics, or rock-breaking. The department's position is that such activities contradict the legislative intent of requiring work from all able-bodied inmates and of maximizing the use of inmates while they are incarcerated. The secretary indicated that implementation of such activities may result in inmates being treated unequally. The department has developed drills and physical training activities for its extended day program for youthful offenders and the female basic training program. While we have concerns related to safety, security, and staffing involved in implementing these activities, we believe that they can be useful for keeping inmates busy.

OPPAGA provides objective, independent, professional analyses of state policies and services to assist the Florida Legislature in decision-making, to ensure government accountability, and to recommend the best use of public resources. Copies of this report in print or alternate accessible format 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.oppaga.state.fl.us/>

Project supervised by: D. Byron Brown (850/487-9215)

Project conducted by: Frank Alvarez (850/487-9274)

