



Office of Program Policy Analysis And Government Accountability



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February 1999

Follow-Up Report on Prevention Programs Administered by the Department of Juvenile Justice

Abstract

- Most of the department's prevention dollars are still not reaching black males, who are at the highest risk of becoming involved in the juvenile delinquency system.
- Prevention programs serve many youth who have already entered the delinquency system. This may be an appropriate intervention to deter these youth from further crime. However, the participation of both delinquent and non-delinquent youth in prevention programs makes it difficult for the Legislature to develop an informed strategy to serve the needs of both types of youth and determine if prevention dollars are being used in the most cost-effective way.
- For prevention community grant programs, the department should specify which high-risk youth are to be served and continue to allow local boards and councils to recommend program providers and program content.

Purpose

In accordance with state law, this follow-up report informs the Legislature of actions taken by the Department of Juvenile Justice in response to our 1997 report.^{1, 2} This report presents our assessment of the extent to which the department has addressed our findings and recommendations.

¹ Section 11.45(7)(f), F.S.

² *Policy Review of Prevention Programs of the Department of Juvenile Justice*, Report No. 96-35, issued January 21, 1997.
<http://www.oppaga.state.fl.us/reports/pdf/9635rpt.pdf>

Background

Chapter 985, F.S., directs the Department of Juvenile Justice to develop and implement effective programs to prevent and reduce acts of delinquency. The department's prevention programs are intended to keep youth in school, keep youth busy, help youth live violence-free, and help youth get jobs. Prevention programs that are successful in deterring youth from committing crimes will lessen public expenditures for judicial and incarceration costs of delinquent youth.

Prior Findings

In our previous report we found that most of the department's prevention resources were not directed toward deterring high-risk youth from entering the delinquency system. In addition, the department's budget did not distinguish between prevention activities to deter youth from entering the delinquency system and intervention activities to keep delinquent youth from committing further crimes.

We recommended that the department use information it routinely collects on youth committed to the department to identify high-risk populations and direct prevention programs to these youth. We also recommended that the department better track characteristics of the prevention program participants to ensure that the programs actually serve their intended population.

In addition, we recommended that the department distinguish between prevention and intervention programs so that the Legislature can develop an informed strategy to serve the needs of both groups and determine if prevention dollars are being used in the most cost-effective way.

The department did not measure long-term outcomes of most of its prevention programs. As a result, the department could not evaluate program effectiveness or use this information to make funding decisions. We recommended that the department track program

participants to determine whether they commit crimes during or after participation in the program.

Current Status

The Department of Juvenile Justice has addressed a number of our concerns. It is compiling demographic information on the youth participating in prevention programs. The department is also collecting data on the number of youth in prevention programs who have prior delinquency referrals and the number who commit crimes during or after participating in prevention programs.

Most of the prevention budget is still not targeted at the youth who are at the highest risk of entering the delinquency system. Also, many prevention programs serve youth who have already entered the delinquency system. To slow the trend of increasing numbers of delinquent youth and reduce department and court costs, new prevention efforts will need to identify and serve high-risk youth before they enter the delinquency system.

While most prevention dollars are allocated by the Appropriations Act, the department is responsible awarding prevention grants to local programs. The department should use its delinquency data to direct these grants so that more high-risk youth are served.

Most of the department's prevention dollars are still not reaching black males, who are at the highest risk of entering the delinquency system. Currently black males are at a higher risk of entering the delinquency system than females or white males. In Fiscal Year 1997-98, 41% of the youth committed to the Department of Juvenile Justice were black males, a percentage disproportionate to the 11% of black male youth in Florida's general population.

However, department prevention programs serve relatively few black male youth. In Fiscal Year 1997-98, only 19% of the youth participating in department delinquency programs were black males. Approximately 80% of the department's prevention/ intervention budget was appropriated to the CINS/FINS (Children in Need of Services and Family in Need of Services) and PACE (Practical Academic Cultural Education) programs. However, the CINS/FINS Program served only 12% black males. The PACE Program, which is for girls, served no black males.

Consequently, prevention dollars are not reaching black males, the highest risk youth. Directing prevention resources to these youth is an important way to address the over-representation of black males in the delinquency system.

Contrary to public perception, prevention programs serve many youth who have already entered the delinquency system. In Fiscal Year 1996-97, approximately 38% of youth participating in prevention programs had prior delinquency referrals. While participation in prevention programs is usually voluntary, it may also be court ordered. The purpose of ordering delinquent youth into prevention programs is to deter the youth from further crime. In many cases this is an appropriate intervention. In addition, department staff point out that they do not want programs to turn away youth with prior delinquencies who decide on their own to become involved in prevention activities that can help them turn their lives around.

However, because these programs serve both populations of youth, it is difficult for the Legislature to get an accurate picture of the level of funding it is committing to preventing youth from entering the delinquency system. Research indicates that prevention dollars are most cost-effective when they keep youth from ever entering the delinquency system.

The department should use its delinquency data to define high-risk populations to be served by community-driven grant programs. To assure that prevention grant programs serve youth with the greatest need, we recommend that the department use the demographic and delinquency data it collects on youth in detention and commitment programs to solicit bids for prevention programs that would serve the populations and neighborhoods that are at greatest risk. Local juvenile justice boards and councils could review the bids and recommend to the department appropriate providers and activities to receive grants to serve these high-risk youth. In Fiscal Year 1998-99, these grants totaled \$9.6 million. The Governor's recommended budget for Fiscal Year 1999-2000 includes a \$6.8 million increase for community-driven grant programs for juvenile prevention programs.

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