

# Arizona Department of Corrections

## Prison Operations' Support Services

### (Report Highlights)

April 2001

Support Services is a subprogram of Prison Operations, providing inmate-related and administrative services for prison operations. These services include functions such as calculating inmate release dates, overseeing inmate stores, operating the business offices at prison complexes, and assigning inmates to protective segregation.

**Our Conclusions:** Although the Department makes few errors in calculating inmates' release dates, it can still improve its processes. In addition, some business management practices at prison business offices and at inmate stores need improvement.

#### The Department Can Improve Process to Calculate Inmate Release Dates

Over 99 percent of all inmate release dates are calculated correctly. Between 1996 and 1999 less than three-tenths of one percent of all releases were late or early.

Inmate Release Errors				
	1996	1997	1998	1999
Released late	27	15	22	18
Released early	4	8	3	13
Total release errors	31	23	25	31
Total releases	14,418	11,967	12,576	10,924

The Department has been able to obtain a low error rate partly because:

- It has improved the reliability of its computer program that calculates sentences, and
- The Legislature passed *Truth in Sentencing* in 1994, simplifying the calculation of sentences.

Despite the low error rate, there are still some basic steps the Department can take to maintain a low error rate in the future.

#### The Department should:

- ✓ Develop a procedures manual for central office and prison records staff to use in calculating sentences.
- ✓ Develop a procedures manual for prison records staff who perform intake or release confirmation procedures.
- ✓ Provide more training to prison records staff.
- ✓ Improve the reliability of the computer program's calculations for sentences occurring before *Truth in Sentencing*.
- ✓ Review whether sentencing documents can be transmitted electronically between the courts and the Department.

## Business Offices and Inmate Stores Need to Improve Operations

Prison business offices and inmate stores handle millions of dollars in financial transactions each year.

**Prison business offices**—The financial controls over the handling of money at the two prison business offices we reviewed appeared adequate. However, staff have not always followed procedures. As a result:

- Between 1992 and 1995, one staff member at the Tucson prison stole \$118,000.
- Between 1998 and 2000, another employee at the same prison allegedly stole \$72,000.

Some of the breakdowns in procedures included:

- Not segregating cash handling
- Not depositing bank deposits promptly
- Not adequately supervising staff.

**Prison inmate stores can be more efficient**—In 1999, an internal Department task force, the Venture Team, reported on inmate store operations, finding many inefficiencies:

- No system-wide computerized system exists for tracking inventory and deducting purchases from inmate accounts
- Types of sales equipment (10-key adding machines, computers, cash registers) varied among stores.

### Venture Team Recommendations for Inmate Stores

- Train officers and inmates working in the stores
- Standardize processes, records, and reporting
- Develop a state-wide computerized store system with bar-coded inmate ID cards and merchandise scanners
- Establish store space based on prison population
- Purchase store product state-wide to realize quantity discounts
- Install video monitors at stores.

### The Department should:

- ✓ Require prison business managers to ensure cash handling duties are segregated
- ✓ Require prison office staff to follow cash-handling policies
- ✓ Standardize inmate store processes, record-keeping and reporting
- ✓ Adopt the Venture Team recommendations.

### To Obtain More Information

- A copy of the full report can be obtained by calling (602) 553-0333 or by visiting our Web site at:

[www.auditorgen.state.az.us](http://www.auditorgen.state.az.us)

- The contact person for this report is ***Shan Hays***.