

**REPORT HIGHLIGHTS**

**PERFORMANCE AUDIT**

**Subject**

Juvenile detention provides for the temporary and safe custody of juveniles while legal action regarding their delinquent acts is pending. Juvenile detention centers are operated under the jurisdiction of the presiding juvenile court judge of the Superior Court in each county where there is a juvenile detention center.

**Our Conclusion**

This audit reviewed the operations of 5 of the 14 juvenile detention centers in the State. Of those, 3 operate adequately while the other two face challenges that, left unaddressed, could be harmful to staff and detainees. In addition, a state-wide effort is needed to improve standards for operating juvenile detention centers and screening juveniles for detention. Finally, the Supreme Court should develop a more comprehensive inspection program.



2007

**Juvenile detention center operations could be improved**

Arizona has 14 juvenile detention centers: 2 in Maricopa County and 1 in each of the other counties except La Paz and Greenlee, which have agreements with Yuma and Graham to house their juveniles. Juvenile detention centers are part of each county's superior court and are primarily funded and operated by their respective counties. The Supreme Court has administrative authority over all courts and court programs, including juvenile detention centers. The Administrative Office of the Courts (AOC) assists the Supreme Court with its administrative responsibilities.

Auditors reviewed the operations at five juvenile detention centers in Coconino, Mohave, Pima, and Santa Cruz Counties and at Maricopa's Durango center. We then used a combination of national standards, best practices, the state operational guidelines, and practices in place at the juvenile detention centers themselves as a basis to review selected operations at these five juvenile detention centers.

**Some safety and security practices need improvement**

One practice needing improvement is control room security. The detention center control room is the eyes and ears of the facility. Although the Maricopa-Durango, Pima, and Coconino centers have fully enclosed, locked control rooms where access is restricted, the Mohave center's is not fully enclosed. The Santa Cruz center's control room is enclosed, but access is not restricted.



Source: Auditor General staff.

- **Key control**—Control over keys is vital to security. Key control involves processes for assigning, issuing and tracking, and storing keys. Three juvenile detention centers have good key control systems. For example, the Maricopa-Durango center has a fully automated, password-protected key control system that automatically tracks and inventories keys. In contrast, the Santa Cruz and Mohave centers do not have sound procedures for issuing and tracking keys.
- **Perimeter security**—The Coconino and Mohave centers combine camera surveillance and perimeter walks to secure their perimeters. The Pima, Maricopa-Durango, and Santa Cruz centers primarily rely on camera surveillance, although there are blind spots that cameras do not cover.
- **"Sight and sound" violations**—According to federal and state law, juveniles must be kept from sight and sound contact with adult prisoners. However, at the Maricopa-Durango center, adults are brought through the juvenile detention facility to access the courts. In the process, adult prisoners have potential sight and sound contact with juveniles.

In fiscal year 2006, 48,395 juveniles were referred to juvenile court. A total of 12,068 (24 percent) of these juveniles were detained in juvenile detention centers.

## Some improvements needed in health services

Each juvenile detention center, except the Santa Cruz center, has a medical professional (such as a medical doctor or registered nurse) who serves as the health services authority and is responsible for the provision of health services at the center.

- **Health screenings**—Juveniles entering a juvenile detention center receive a health screening to identify any special health needs. The Coconino and Pima centers are the only juvenile detention centers where the health screenings are administered by a medical provider or by staff specially trained by a healthcare provider.
- **TB testing**—All five centers screen staff for TB as a condition of employment. Three centers screen all juveniles within 7 days of admission to the juvenile detention center. The Mohave center tests only those juveniles committed to Juvenile Corrections, while the Santa Cruz center tests those juveniles as well as Mexican nationals.
- **Administering medications**—Four centers require a healthcare provider or specially trained detention staff to administer medications. In the Santa Cruz center, detention staff with limited or no training administer medications. Further, the Santa Cruz center does not store medications in a secured location, and the Mohave center only recently began storing prescription medications in a locked medical box in the control room.
- **Suicide prevention and intervention**—An effective prevention and intervention system includes training, a screening mechanism to assess suicide risk, and a determination whether a risk exists. Four juvenile detention centers use health screening questions and/or objective suicide screening instruments to assess suicide risk. The Santa Cruz center uses a suicide screening questionnaire that relies on staff interpretation of a juvenile's responses. In addition, the Santa Cruz center houses juveniles at risk for suicide in a room without a camera and a small window that provides only a limited view of the room.

### Recommendation

- The Santa Cruz and Mohave juvenile detention centers had several recommendations directed to them ranging from key control and access to the control room, to health services issues, to suicide-risk issues.

## State-wide effort needed to improve detention center operating standards

Arizona's guidelines represent the minimum guidance for juvenile detention center operations.

## Some improvements needed in behavior management practices

- **Behavior management**—Four of the five juvenile detention centers have systems to reinforce positive behavior with meaningful rewards and privileges. Under the systems, juveniles earn points or grades that translate into rewards and privileges, such as extra recreation time, additional phone calls, or longer visits with family members.

At the Santa Cruz center, privileges increase with the length of stay. For example, male juveniles did not earn the "privilege" of wearing socks or underwear until they had been there for 2 weeks. Since September 2007, this juvenile detention center has abandoned this practice and plans to implement more meaningful rewards.

- **Use of isolation and mechanical restraints**—These tools are used to safely, securely, and temporarily control a juvenile whose behavior poses a threat to self or others. According to operational guidelines, such tools should be used sparingly and only after other efforts to calm the juvenile have failed.

The Santa Cruz center makes greater use of isolation because of staffing shortages. For example, it sometimes has to run school in shifts and confines half of the juveniles in their rooms while the other half attends school. The Mohave center mechanically restrains juveniles who pose an escape risk and restrains some juveniles to stationary objects.

## Adequate staffing important for juvenile welfare

- **Adequate staffing ratios**—A low staff-to-juvenile ratio (1 staff to 10 juveniles is recommended during the day) allows staff to react proactively and avoid potential problems. In September 2006 and February 2007, the Mohave center had daytime staffing ratios of 1:19 and 1:15, respectively. Since then, the Mohave center has put a cap on the detention population, and the Board of Supervisors has authorized six new positions.

However, compliance with the guidelines is voluntary.

- **Guidelines provide varying levels of guidance—**

Some guidelines provide detailed and specific direction, and some do not. About 25 percent (18) of the guidelines provide little or no guidance beyond instructions to have a plan or policy in place. Although these guidelines cover such important areas as key control, behavior management, use of physical force, and disciplinary hearings, they do not explain, for example, what good key control policies and procedures should include. A juvenile detention center could comply with these types of guidelines merely by having a plan in place.

- **Need to develop mandatory operational standards—**Under the direction of the Arizona Judicial Council, the AOC should work with the county juvenile courts to develop mandatory standards. This can

largely be done by improving the current guidelines and developing new standards where appropriate. These standards should provide more specific guidance to the centers, and compliance with the standards should be mandatory.

In developing the standards and under the direction of the Arizona Judicial Council, the AOC should work with the county juvenile courts to incorporate performance-based standards where possible. Some of the juvenile detention centers already use some form of performance-based standards to evaluate their operations. For example, the Coconino center has developed and tracked the percentage of parents visiting detained juveniles. The performance-based standard is that at least 70 percent of detained youth will have an in-person contact with a parent or guardian while in detention.

### Recommendation

- Under the direction of the Arizona Judicial Council, the AOC should work with the county juvenile courts to develop mandatory operational standards, incorporating performance-based standards where possible.

## Screening for detaining juveniles needs to be improved

The Supreme Court has established criteria for when a juvenile should be detained. However, the counties have developed different approaches for determining whether a juvenile meets these criteria. Because of a lack of consistent screening processes among counties, a juvenile in one jurisdiction may be detained for breaking curfew or shoplifting, whereas one in another jurisdiction may not be detained.

The decision whether to detain a juvenile is important because detention can be harmful. It limits the potential positive effects of family, school, and employment on a juvenile and increases the risk of death from suicide and the risk of illness. In addition, detention may not be appropriate for mentally ill juveniles, who may make up at least 60 percent of juvenile detainees.

Counties are already attempting to detain only appropriate juveniles. State totals of detained juveniles have dropped from almost 14,000 in 2002 to

a little more than 12,000 in 2006. However, to reduce evaluation differences between the counties and under the direction of the Arizona Judicial Council, the AOC should work with county juvenile courts to develop and implement policies and/or standards to appropriately and consistently screen juveniles for detention.

The AOC should also work with the counties to continue to identify and use alternatives to detention. Detention alternatives are typically more cost-effective than detention. Alternatives include home detention, electronic monitoring, intensive supervision, day/evening reporting centers, skills training, and services to juveniles and their families.

Using alternatives to detention, Pima County reports reducing its average daily population from 176 juveniles per day in 2003 to 127 per day in 2006. The savings can be significant. For example, it costs \$154 per day to detain a juvenile at a center compared to \$65 per day for evening reporting and \$6.46 per day for electronic monitoring.

### Recommendations

- Under the direction of the Arizona Judicial Council, the AOC should work with the county juvenile courts to develop and implement policies and/or standards for appropriately and consistently screening juveniles for detention.
- The AOC should work with the county juvenile courts to continue to identify and use alternatives to detention

## More comprehensive inspections needed

Statute requires the Arizona Department of Juvenile Corrections (Juvenile Corrections) to inspect county juvenile detention centers semiannually. Inspectors select 3 to 4 of the 74 guidelines to examine at each juvenile detention center, selecting a different 3 to 4 for inspection every 6 months.

In 2004, the AOC also began to conduct annual inspections of juvenile detention centers, selecting an average of 2 of the 74 guidelines to examine. The AOC also conducts an operational review of each center every 3 years. It appears that AOC inspections are more comprehensive than Juvenile Corrections'.

Although the AOC and Juvenile Corrections coordinate inspections, some important guidelines related to health and safety and security have not been reviewed. In addition, Juvenile Corrections inspections review only whether the centers have policies to address the guidelines and generally do not verify whether the centers actually follow the policies.

Further, there is no process to ensure that problems that inspections identify are corrected. For example, four consecutive Juvenile Corrections inspections of one juvenile detention center from 2003 to 2006 found that staff were not receiving required TB tests.

- **Supreme Court should be given responsibility for inspections**—When Juvenile

Corrections was originally given responsibility for inspecting juvenile detention centers, the Supreme Court did not have the capability or clear authority to do inspections. However, several factors suggest that the AOC should now assume responsibility for these inspections. These factors include:

- **Capability**—The AOC now not only has the capability to conduct inspections, but conducts more thorough inspections than Juvenile Corrections.
- **Authority to enforce**—Legal rulings have since determined that the Supreme Court has administrative authority for the entire court system, meaning it has authority to require juvenile detention centers to correct problems that inspections identify. Juvenile Corrections does not have statutory authority to enforce compliance with its recommendations.
- **Lower priority for Juvenile Corrections**—Juvenile Corrections has experienced serious safety and security issues at its own facilities that resulted in federal intervention. Addressing these issues has been a top priority, whereas detention center inspections has been a lesser priority.

If given statutory authority for inspecting juvenile detention centers, the AOC should increase its inspections' scope and impact. The AOC should conduct a thorough inspection of each facility once every 3 years, assessing compliance with all guidelines. The AOC should also conduct annual inspections of each center by spot-checking a few selected guidelines and following up on previous problems.

### TO OBTAIN MORE INFORMATION

A copy of the full report can be obtained by calling  
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### Recommendations

- The Legislature should consider transferring the authority to conduct juvenile detention center inspections from Juvenile Corrections to the AOC.
- If given such authority, the AOC should conduct comprehensive inspections of each detention center at least every 3 years, and enforce compliance with inspection recommendations.