



Secretary of State Audit Report

Oregon Youth Authority: Availability of Juvenile Offender Data

Summary

PURPOSE

The purpose of this audit was to determine whether data relating to juvenile offenders at the Oregon Youth Authority and the 36 Oregon counties are readily available for decision makers for evaluating the effectiveness of Oregon's juvenile justice system.

BACKGROUND

In 1995, the Oregon Legislative Assembly passed Senate Bill 1, which created the Oregon Youth Authority (Youth Authority) and requires the Secretary of State to regularly audit the Oregon juvenile justice system programs, policies and services as to their effectiveness in providing public safety and preventing a youth's return to criminal behavior.

Senate Bill 1 also stated that the juvenile justice system "shall be open and accountable to the people of Oregon and their elected representatives". Centralized juvenile justice data can provide accurate and timely information to assist decision makers in making key decisions, such as those relating to program direction and the allocation of resources to areas that appear to have the greatest effect on reducing juvenile crime.

In 1999, the Youth Authority established the Juvenile Justice Information System (JJIS). JJIS was intended to provide information about youths in the juvenile system across state, county and local agencies that was previously unavailable. In 2002, we audited JJIS and found that it provided useful information, but some data were not valid or entered consistently. Since our 2002 audit, significant improvements have been made in the way juvenile offender data are captured and reported.

RESULTS IN BRIEF

We found that most data relating to juvenile offenders at the Oregon Youth Authority and the 36 Oregon counties are readily available to assist decision makers in making program and resource choices regarding Oregon's juvenile justice system.

Additionally, we found that the Youth Authority, in conjunction with the JJIS Steering Committee produces annual reports on detention, referrals, dispositions, and recidivism, and also has made available to JJIS users more than 250 reports with information ranging from case management, to detention and closed custody data.

However, our audit also found that information on data variations and trends available in JJIS reports is limited or does not exist. Further, restitution, community service, and treatment data are not consistently captured in JJIS, and education data, maintained by the Oregon Department of Education, are not available from the Youth Authority.

RECOMMENDATIONS

We recommend the Oregon Youth Authority:

- Include in their annual reports a summary of data variations, including potential reasons for these variations, and data trends.
- Work through the JJIS Steering Committee to capture in JJIS or collect from county juvenile officials restitution and community service data and proceed with its plan to make the data available in report form.
- Continue working with the JJIS Steering Committee and county officials to explore options for including treatment data in JJIS.
- Request that the Department of Education make available a report on education services provided to incarcerated juveniles through the Youth Corrections Education Program.

AGENCY'S RESPONSE

The Oregon Youth Authority generally agrees with the recommendations. The agency's complete response can be found on page 4.

Background

Senate Bill 1 Created the Oregon Youth Authority

In 1995, the Oregon Legislative Assembly passed Senate Bill 1, which created the Oregon Youth Authority (Youth Authority). Senate Bill 1 also requires the Secretary of State to regularly audit the Oregon juvenile justice system programs, policies and services as to their effectiveness in providing public safety and preventing a youth's return to criminal behavior, and states that the juvenile justice system shall be open and accountable to the people of Oregon and their elected representatives.

Centralized Data is Key to Decision Making

Centralized data can provide accurate and timely information to the citizens of Oregon, legislators, the Youth Authority, and county juvenile departments to assist them in making key decisions, such as those relating to the direction of programs, policies and services and the allocation of resources to areas that appear to have the greatest effect on reducing juvenile crime.

According to local juvenile justice advocates and professionals, data necessary to evaluate juvenile justice system programs, policies and services include, but are not limited to, detention, accountability agreements, referrals, adjudications, dispositions, completion of treatment programs, recidivism, restitution, community service and education. We believe that comparisons over time of these data can assist decision makers in identifying trends, which can further assist them in making program and resource choices.

Youth Authority Established the Juvenile Justice Information System

In 1999, the Youth Authority established the Juvenile Justice Information System (JJIS) to centrally track and provide information about youths in the juvenile system across state, county and local agencies.

In our 2002 review of JJIS, (Report No. 2002-44), we found that JJIS provided useful information, but some data were not valid or entered consistently. For example, not all counties entered juvenile data into JJIS.

The JJIS Steering Committee

When the Youth Authority created JJIS, it also formed partnerships with the counties and organized the JJIS Steering Committee, comprised primarily of state and county representatives. The purpose of the Steering Committee is to assist in centralizing the JJIS record keeping processes of the Youth Authority facilities and the 36 independently operated county juvenile departments. The Steering Committee also helps to insure that appropriate information is captured in JJIS by determining JJIS polices and procedures, including the mandatory minimum and best practices data elements policy.

JJIS mandatory minimum data elements are data that JJIS users are required to enter into JJIS for statewide reporting purposes. Mandatory minimum data include youths' personal data, such as full name, sex and date of birth; referral and allegation data, such as information from police reports; and detention and disposition information, such as how much time a youth is ordered to spend in a detention facility. JJIS best practices data elements are data that JJIS users are recommended to

enter into JJIS for youth case management and for sharing information across juvenile justice jurisdictions. Examples of best practices data elements are a youth's social security number, school information, and caseworker's name.

Audit Results

Most Juvenile Justice Data Are Available

We found that most data relating to juvenile offenders at the Oregon Youth Authority and the 36 Oregon counties are readily available for decision makers to assist them in making program and resource choices regarding Oregon's juvenile justice system.

Since our 2002 JJIS audit, the Youth Authority and the JJIS Steering Committee have made significant improvements in the way juvenile offender data are captured and reported. According to Youth Authority officials, each of the 36 county juvenile departments consistently enters juvenile data into JJIS. These data include personal information about youths such as their birth date and family contacts; information from police reports, formal and informal accountability agreements, and petitions; and court decisions, such as the amount of time ordered to serve in a Youth Authority or county detention facility.

In addition, we found that the Youth Authority, in conjunction with the JJIS Steering Committee produces annual reports on detention, referrals, dispositions, and recidivism. These reports are available on the Youth Authority's website

http://egov.oregon.gov/oya/rpts_pubs.shtml and present data at both the statewide and county levels. Annual detention reports are available for 2002-2004; annual referrals and dispositions reports

are available for 2001-2004; and recidivism reports are available covering 1996-2002.

The “Detention Admission and Length of Stay” report presents data on youth admissions to and release from juvenile detention facilities. According to the 2004 report, the state average for youths assigned detention prior to adjudication, which is analogous to a conviction in the adult corrections system, is 64 percent. The average length of stay in a detention facility is 9.6 days.

The “Data and Evaluation Report: Youth Referrals” describes the types of offenses committed by juveniles and characteristics of the juveniles committing these offenses. A referral is a law enforcement action, equivalent to an arrest in the adult system. According to the 2004 report, the state average of youths in the juvenile justice system with criminal referrals is 67 percent, non-criminal referrals is 24 percent, and dependency referrals is 9 percent. Dependency referrals include youth runaways and youths whose behavior is a danger to themselves, or others.

The “Disposition Reports: Dispositions of Youth, Referrals, and Referrals by Offense Category and by Demographics” describes the number of youths who received a disposition, and are reported on the most intense disposition assigned to each youth. A disposition is the adult court equivalent to a sentence. The 2004 state average for dismissal disposition is 45 percent, diversion programs and other informal dispositions is 33 percent, probation and other formal dispositions is 21 percent, and adjudication to an adult court is 1 percent.¹

¹ Youth who commit Measure 11 crimes, which include felony person-to-person crimes and murder, are adjudicated to adult court. Measure 11

As mandated by Senate Bill 1, the Youth Authority, via the JJIS Steering Committee, produces recidivism reports, the most recent one of which is the “1998-2002 Juvenile Recidivism: Oregon’s Statewide Report on Juvenile Recidivism”. The report defines recidivism as “a new criminal referral within the first 12 months of the initial referral.” According to the report, statewide juvenile recidivism decreased from 1998 to 2002, with ‘chronic offenders’, or offenders who committed three or more crimes within 12 months of initial referral, decreasing from 9.1 percent to 6.3 percent of the juvenile justice system population.

In addition to the above reports, the Youth Authority has designed and made available to JJIS users more than 250 reports with information ranging from case management to detention and closed custody data. The Youth Authority also can prepare customized reports upon request.

Not All Reports Summarize Data Variations or Include Data Trends

The JJIS annual reports on detention, referrals, dispositions, and recidivism do not summarize or explain data variations. In addition, with the exception of the recidivism report, the reports do not include data trends.

Identification and explanation of large variations in the information presented would assist report readers in understanding the data. For example, the 2004 detention report shows that three of 36 counties have 100 percent pre-

crimes require mandatory minimum sentences, depending on the type of crime committed. Youths who commit Measure 11 crimes are under the jurisdiction of the adult corrections system; if they commit their crimes before age 18, they serve their sentences in a Youth Authority closed custody facility up to age 25.

adjudicatory admission rates, but does not explain what those counties are doing differently. Also, the 2004 dispositions report shows that two of 36 counties either dismissed or sent 100 percent of juvenile crime referrals to the Youth Authority without further explanation.

We learned from Youth Authority and county juvenile detention officials that some potential reasons for data differences among counties are variations in local charging practices and policies, county detention resources, and unique youth criminal histories. Inclusion of these possible reasons for, and examples of data variations in each report would provide readers a more complete perspective on the juvenile justice system.

Another piece of information that would benefit readers and decision makers would be the inclusion of data trends in each report. Currently, only the recidivism report includes data trends. As noted above, the Youth Authority has at least three years’ worth of data for each report type; a summary of data trends over the past three or more years would improve reader understanding of the data and assist decision makers.

Complete Restitution, Community Service, and Treatment Data are Not Available

We found that restitution, community service, and treatment data are not consistently captured in JJIS and available for decision makers.

Senate Bill 1 states that the juvenile justice system “is founded on the principles of personal responsibility, accountability and reformation within the context of public safety and restitution to the victims and to the community.”

We learned that approximately one-quarter of the county juvenile departments do not enter restitution and community service data into JJIS. Examples of reasons that some counties do not enter these data into JJIS are a lack of county resources, and alternative data systems that are better tailored than JJIS to meet specific county needs. According to JJIS policy, restitution and community service data are not mandatory and they are not encouraged as a best practice for entry into JJIS. However, Youth Authority officials informed us that within the next year the counties and the Youth Authority intend to gather restitution and community service data either from JJIS or directly from counties for annual reporting purposes.

Because of confidentiality concerns by some counties, treatment data, including drug and alcohol rehabilitation and mental health services, are not consistently entered into JJIS. Youth Authority officials told us that the JJIS Steering Committee is exploring options for including treatment data in JJIS.

Education Data are Not Available from the Youth Authority

We found that information relating to juvenile offender education is collected and maintained by the Oregon Department of Education and is not available from the Youth Authority in any form.

Chapter 336 of the *Oregon Revised Statutes* states that the Department of Education is responsible for providing educational services to incarcerated juvenile offenders. The Youth Corrections Education Program, a department within the Department of Education, maintains data on the provision of education services to youths in the juvenile justice system. The Department of

Education does not use JJIS to track juvenile offender education data; however, it uses its own data tracking system called Penamation.

Recommendations

We recommend that the Youth Authority:

Include in its annual reports a summary of data variations, including potential reasons for these variations, and data trends.

Agency's Response:

We agree but do not have sufficient resources in this area to be able to accomplish this in the near future. The JJIS Steering Committee has been discussing the need for resources at either the state or county level to provide more ability to analyze the data that JJIS provides. The Committee will continue working to either designate resources for this or seek additional resources.

We also recommend they work through the JJIS Steering Committee to capture in JJIS or collect from county juvenile officials restitution and community service data and proceed with its plan to make the data available in report form.

Agency's Response:

We agree. A combined restitution and community service reporting model has been presented to the Oregon Juvenile Department Directors Association (OJDDA) and they have sanctioned work to continue on it. The Data and Evaluation Subcommittee of the JJIS Steering Committee has recruited the majority of counties to pilot the report. The subcommittee is also reviewing the draft introduction for the report, and it is targeted that the first annual report containing 2005 data will be published for participating counties early in 2006.

We also recommend they continue working with the JJIS Steering Committee and county officials to explore options for including treatment data in JJIS.

Agency's Response:

We agree. The Data and Evaluation Subcommittee has approved a framework for this which will be presented to OJDDA in September. Services and interventions tracking should begin by early next year for participating counties with a target for a first report by 2007.

We also recommend they request that the Department of Education make available a report on education services provided to incarcerated juveniles through the Youth Corrections Education Program.

Agency's Response:

We agree and will forward such a request.

Objectives, Scope and Methodology

The purpose of this audit was to determine whether data relating to juvenile offenders at the Oregon Youth Authority and the 36 Oregon counties are readily available for decision makers for evaluating the effectiveness of Oregon's juvenile justice system. The purpose of this audit was not to validate JJIS data; therefore, we did not test or verify JJIS data.

We were able to determine the availability of youth offender data that can provide information about youths in the juvenile justice system across state, county and local agencies. However, we could not conclude on the effectiveness of any one juvenile justice system program, policy or service in providing public safety and preventing a youth's return to criminal behavior. Changes in behavior can be measured, for

example, by a reduction in recidivism. However, in order to attribute the behavior change to any one factor, we would need to ascertain that a particular factor was the primary reason for the change. Because of the numerous factors that can influence a youth's behavior, we were unable to conclude that any identified change was a direct result of any one factor.

We reviewed Senate Bill 1 (1995) regarding the statutory requirement that the Secretary of State regularly audit the juvenile justice system. We obtained and reviewed Youth Authority policies and procedures, and interviewed Youth Authority officials and staff in order to gain a better understanding of the juvenile justice system.

We reviewed prior audit reports and followed up on findings related to our audit objective.

We consulted Youth Authority officials and received information from the Oregon Governor's office and Crime Victim's United, a not-for-profit organization, to determine data necessary to evaluate juvenile justice system programs.

We interviewed several county juvenile justice officials regarding their use of the Juvenile Justice Information System (JJIS) for entering and tracking restitution, community service, and treatment data. We reviewed and documented the JJIS record layout, which is the list and contents of the data tables contained within JJIS. We reviewed the list of approximately 250 reports available to JJIS users. We reviewed the JJIS Steering Committee mandatory data elements policy. We reviewed the following 2003 and 2004 reports: "Detention Admission and Length of Stay", "Data and Evaluation Report: Youth Referrals", the "Disposition Reports: Dispositions of Youth, Referrals, and Referrals by Offense Category and by

Demographics". We also reviewed the "1998-2002 Juvenile Recidivism: Oregon's Statewide Report on Juvenile Recidivism". We identified some data variations in these reports and found that none were significant enough to warrant our further review.

We conducted our review from November 2004 to June 2005, in accordance with generally accepted government auditing standards.



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The courtesies and cooperation extended by the officials and staff of the Oregon Youth Authority were commendable and much appreciated.

This report, a public record, is intended to promote the best possible management of public resources. Copies may be obtained from our website on the internet at:

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