

OVERVIEW

Management and Financial Audit of the Department of Public Safety

Report No. 00-05, February 2000

Summary

Administering correctional institutions is complex and demanding. The Legislature requested a management and financial audit in the face of facility overcrowding, lack of inmate services, insufficient staffing, and excessive use of overtime.

We found breaches in prison security that seriously jeopardize public safety. For example, the security classification of one-third of our statewide sample was incorrect and resulted in inmates being confined in lower security levels than they should be, and ineligible inmates being released into community furlough programs. Missing facility firearms, keys, and extremely hazardous tools also compromised the well-being of the public, employees, and inmates. Inadequate screening of visitors and deliveries, inoperable security equipment, and few searches for contraband compromise safety.

We also found that inmates were not provided with adequate access to health care services. Initial health and dental examinations and routine physicals were not completed for many inmates. Even when exams were provided they were often late. This was so even after a national accreditation commission reported such deficiencies. In fact, the failure to provide dental examinations increased by 36 percent following the commission's findings.

Moreover, failure to address inmate grievances in a timely manner results in inadequate protection from cruel and unusual punishment and deprives inmates of their rights as protected under federal law and rules.

We also found that the director failed to provide the leadership and guidance needed to efficiently staff facilities and control the department's extraordinary overtime costs. Essential security posts, those posts that must be staffed, are arbitrarily designated by facility wardens and resulted in widespread staffing variations. Flaws in the department's staffing formula identified in our 1992 audit have yet to be addressed and efforts to eliminate abusive leave patterns need improvement. Although the department's sick abuse program initially resulted in overtime decreases, we found overtime costs have since increased every year. Furthermore, not all patterns of potential sick leave abuse are identified and staff are allowed to circumvent the parameters of the sick leave abuse program. For example, during a six-month period one officer called in sick four times before his scheduled days off, three times before or after a weekend, and two times before or after payday without being investigated for potential sick leave abuses.

The department's management of state resources and inmates' funds is also seriously deficient. This has resulted in \$2 million in staff overpayments remaining uncollected, improper inmate pay, and thousands of dollars in state



resources unaccounted for. Furthermore, the success of the department's correctional industries program, an inmate work training program, was compromised when program staff diverted revenue and funding to inmate-affiliated businesses.

We also found the department failed in its fiduciary responsibilities to victims and children of inmates. Although the statutes require the director to enforce victim restitution orders against moneys earned by incarcerated inmates, six of eight facilities failed to garnishee inmates' earnings for restitution. Also new deposits to inmate trust accounts were not garnisheed for those inmates owing child support. The department's fiduciary responsibilities to inmates were also disregarded, resulting in reported inmate account balances being higher than the actual cash available for inmate use.

Recommendations and Response

Our report makes a number of recommendations that point to the director's responsibility to ensure public safety through its administration of correctional institutions. We recommended that the director make security controls a top priority. We also recommended that the director improve inmates' access to medical services, comply with the requirements of the federal Civil Rights Act of Incarcerated Individuals, and establish clear guidelines for the sufficient staffing of all correctional institutions. The director should ensure that department staff are properly trained, address problems with possible leave abuses, and ensure the financial integrity of the department's records and assets.

The department responded that our audit provided it with some good information about specific problem areas; however it disagreed with two of our audit findings. The department disputes that security breaches compromise public safety and that the director has not provided adequate leadership to ensure efficient staffing and limit overtime. The department's disputes are without merit; we stand by our audit findings. We used as standards the department's own policies and procedures, the standards of the corrections profession, and accepted principles of management.

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