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Report Highlights

Use of Room Confinement/Isolation in Juvenile Detention Centers and Secure Care Facilities

House Resolution 50 of the 2021 Regular Legislative Session

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Why We Conducted This Audit

We evaluated the use of room confinement/isolation in juvenile (local) detention centers and (state) secure care facilities throughout Louisiana during calendar years 2019 and 2020. We conducted this audit as a result of House Resolution 50 of the 2021 Regular Legislative Session, which asked the legislative auditor to conduct an audit on the use of solitary or room confinement or room isolation in facilities housing juveniles arrested or adjudicated for a delinquent or status offense in the state of Louisiana, including the duration, reasons, and demographics of juveniles held in room confinement by facility.

What We Found

Juvenile Detention Centers: Louisiana's juvenile detention standards allow the use of room confinement for up to 72 hours and for disciplinary reasons. According to detention centers, staffing shortages, older and more violent youth, outdated facilities that are too small, and inadequate funding directly impact the use of room confinement. Specifically, we found the following:

- **In calendar years 2019 and 2020, at least 1,318 youth were assigned to 6,188 instances of room confinement. While the average amount of room confinement time was 20.7 hours, detention centers document room confinement differently and do not always include required information, which makes it difficult to know exactly how much time youth are spending in room confinement.** However, some instances of room confinement exceeded 72 hours, which violates standards. We also found that some detention centers do not include sleep time in the calculation of room confinement duration when confinement extends overnight, which makes their confinement duration shorter than centers that do.
- **The most prevalent reason for room confinement in detention centers was youth-on-youth fighting and physical aggression, and most instances involved black 16-year-old males. Although best practices recommend avoiding room confinement as a consequence for negative behavior, Louisiana's standards allow the use of room confinement for disciplinary reasons.** Of the 6,188 instances of room confinement in calendar years 2019 and 2020, youth-on-youth fighting and threats/violence to staff accounted for 2,171 (35.1%) of confinement. However, the detention centers also used room confinement as a punishment for lesser negative behaviors, such as failure to follow instructions and disruptive behavior, which accounted for 2,302 (37.2%) of confinements.

Juvenile Detention Centers provide secure care for youth while awaiting court proceedings. The Department of Children and Family Services (DCFS) has licensing authority over the 13 juvenile detention facilities in the state and establishes statewide standards for these facilities.

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What We Found (Cont.)

Secure Care Facilities: Unlike detention centers, which are licensed and must follow standards, there are no laws or regulations that govern the use of room confinement in secure care facilities. OJJ has developed policies that allow the use of extended behavioral intervention for up to seven days, or 168 hours. According to OJJ policy, youth who engage in behaviors such as riotous behavior, major property damage, aggressive and intentional assaults on other youth or staff, and escapes or attempted escapes are placed in extended behavioral intervention. According to OJJ, multiple challenges have resulted in the need to use extended behavioral intervention, including an increase in the number of violent youth and a lack of experienced staff. Specifically, we found the following:

- **In calendar years 2019 and 2020, approximately 217 youth in secure care facilities were assigned 751 instances of room confinement. The average amount of time youth were in room confinement was 137 hours. In August 2020, OJJ changed its policy from a maximum of eight hours to a maximum of seven days (168 hours). However, we found that 76 (33.2%) of these instances of confinement that occurred after this policy change exceeded seven days (168 hours).** In addition, the overall length of confinement for youth in secure care facilities is higher than the national average.
- **The most prevalent reason for room confinement in secure care facilities was threats, cursing, or violence towards staff, followed by disruptive behavior.** However, we were unable to determine what behavior led to room confinement at Swanson-Monroe because youth destroyed confinement records. Most instances of room confinement were for black 16-year-old males.

The Office of Juvenile Justice (OJJ) oversees youth that have been adjudicated by a court or placed under OJJ supervision or custody by a judge. Secure care facilities house youth considered a threat to public safety. OJJ houses females in a privately-owned contracted secure care facility. The agency operated four secure care facilities for males during the scope of this audit.*

*OJJ opened Acadiana Center for Youth - St. Martinville in August 2021. Because our scope was calendar years 2019 through 2020, we did not look at room confinement at this facility.