



Legislative Post Audit Performance Audit Report Highlights

Highlights

Juvenile Justice Authority: Evaluating Safety and Program Issues at the Kansas Juvenile Correctional Complex, Part I

Report Highlights

July 2012 • R-12-006

Audit Concern

Legislators have expressed a variety of concerns about the operations at KJCC, including the safety and security of juvenile offenders and corrections officers.

Other Relevant Facts for Question 1

The Juvenile Justice Authority (JJA) has been responsible for supervising and providing services to all juvenile offenders in state custody since 1997.

The Kansas Juvenile Correctional Complex (KJCC) is a medium and maximum-security facility located in Topeka. KJCC houses about 220 male and 20 female juvenile offenders between the ages of 13 and 22.

AUDIT QUESTION 1: Does the Kansas Juvenile Correctional Complex Take Adequate Steps to Ensure the Safety of Juvenile Offenders and Staff?

AUDIT ANSWERS and KEY FINDINGS:

Findings Related to Specific Security and Safety Issues:

Overall, we identified numerous safety and security problems at the Kansas Juvenile Correctional Complex (KJCC):

- KJCC staff have not adequately supervised juvenile offenders, which has led to offender injuries and misconduct.
 - Poor supervision in living units and the dining area has led to theft, injuries, and sexual misconduct.
 - Failure to properly monitor juvenile offenders in the segregation unit has led to juveniles harming themselves.
 - Juvenile offenders also have harmed themselves while on suicide precaution because they were not adequately supervised.
 - Offenders assisting in the kitchen and dining area were not adequately supervised, which has been an ongoing safety problem.

- Staff routinely have allowed doors to be propped open or unlocked at times, allowing juveniles to freely roam living units and access unauthorized areas.
 - Doors within the living units have routinely been propped open or left unlocked.
 - Doors that are meant to control movement throughout the facility have not been properly monitored or secured, allowing juvenile offenders to roam in areas they should not be.
 - In the school area and for some professional staff offices, doors have been propped open as a way for staff to protect themselves.

- KJCC staff have done a poor job of keeping prohibited items out of the facility.
 - Security at KJCC's two entrances has been inadequate to keep prohibited items from entering the facility.
 - KJCC has not been regularly searched for prohibited items as required.
 - KJCC officials have not acted on the results of searches.
 - The facility does not have clear policies or procedures for tracking, investigating, or disposing of prohibited items once found.

- KJCC staff have not tracked, inventoried, or secured keys and tools.
 - Two recent reviews of the facility found numerous problems with key control.
 - JJA's own internal review showed that officials do not have good control over tools or other items that could be used for harm.
 - KJCC has recently begun taking steps to correct problems with its key and tool control, but still has room for improvement.

Findings Related to Personnel Management:

Safety and Security Problems at KJCC have been compounded by poor personnel management.

- Officials have employed staff with felony or drug convictions because the facility's background check process was inadequate.
 - The overall process for background checks has been disorganized and inadequate to ensure appropriate employees work at the facility.
 - The facility recently hired two juvenile corrections officers despite drug-related convictions.
 - Annual background checks on two current employees revealed unallowable criminal convictions, but officials have not dismissed or disciplined them.
- Juvenile corrections officers have not received sufficient and appropriate training in recent years.
 - Three of nine new staff who were promoted to permanent status in 2011 did not have the statutorily required 160 training hours.
 - Most existing juvenile corrections officers have not completed the required number of annual training hours in recent years.
 - The facility has not targeted its training regimen to areas of major concern, as required by policy.
- KJCC officials have done a poor job of disciplining staff for policy violations.
 - Staff at KJCC have not been consistently disciplined for policy violations.
 - KJCC officials have not applied progressively stronger penalties for repeat violations.
 - Officials have not maintained adequate data on disciplinary actions.
- There is some evidence that shifts at KJCC have not been staffed and supervised properly to ensure safety and security.
 - About 40% of employees responding to our survey said they were aware of instances when KJCC was not staffed as called for by policy.
 - KJCC officials were working on a staffing analysis, as recommended in a review by the Department of Corrections.
 - Until recently, supervisors have not been covering shifts that are most incident-prone.
 - Comments from staff responding to our survey indicated they did not feel adequately supervised.

Other Relevant Facts

Previous performance audits in 1989 and 1994 had found recurring problems with poor management and lax security practices at KJCC.

Findings Related to the Overall Security Environment:

The environment at KJCC has not been conducive to ensuring the safety and security of juvenile offenders and staff.

- KJCC's management has been disorganized and has done a poor job of communicating safety and security policies.
 - KJCC management officials did not have processes in place to handle routine tasks, have failed to follow through on actions, and in general, record keeping at the facility has been inadequate.
 - Management has also done a poor job of establishing and communicating clear, concise, and easy-to-follow safety and security policies.
- Severe problems with turnover have increased safety and security risks.
 - Over the past five years, KJCC has had the highest turnover rate (32%) among most Kansas correctional facilities.
 - In addition to staff turnover, KJCC has had four different superintendents in the past six years.
 - Several factors appear to have contributed to the high turnover at KJCC, including lagging salaries for corrections officers, stressful working conditions including forced overtime, and low staff morale.
 - High turnover increases the risk of harm to juvenile offenders and staff.
 - KJCC officials told us they have taken some steps to try and address KJCC's high turnover rate.
- JJA and KJCC officials appear to have favored convenience and expedience over safety and security.
 - Numerous safety and security problems we found were caused by both management and staff putting convenience before safety and security.
 - KJCC staff do not perceive management as being committed to safety and security—only 56% agreed that safety and security is an important concern of management.
- KJCC management has done a poor job of addressing safety and security problems once they have become aware of them.
 - KJCC officials have not routinely reviewed safety and security incidents to identify and correct problems.
 - JJA and KJCC officials have known about the safety and security issues at KJCC for years, but have failed to remedy the problems.

SUMMARY OF RECOMMENDATIONS

Question 1 Recommendations:

- We made a series of recommendations aimed at addressing the specific security and safety issues at KJCC. These included recommendations for supervising juvenile offenders, keeping prohibited items out of the facility, securing tools and keys, and cleaning up policies and processes.
- We also made numerous recommendations to address the facility's personnel management problems in the areas of background checks, proper facility staffing, employee discipline, and staff training.
- We made recommendations to address problems with the Juvenile Justice Authority's and KJCC's overall security environment. These included recommendations to address turnover and the facility's critical incident review process.
- Finally, we recommended that JJA and KJCC officials provide a status report on the implementation of these recommendations to the Legislative Post Audit Committee by December 2012, and that the Committee consider a follow-up audit.

AGENCY RESPONSE

- Agency officials agreed with the findings and indicated they would implement the recommendations.

HOW DO I GET AN AUDIT APPROVED?

By law, individual legislators, legislative committees, or the Governor may request an audit, but any audit work conducted by the Division must be approved by the Legislative Post Audit Committee, a 10-member committee that oversees the Division's work. Any legislator who would like to request an audit should contact the Division directly at (785) 296-3792.

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