

# oppaga

# Progress Report

August 2004



## Corrections Program Still Challenged by Inmate Idleness, Prison Planning, and Fleet Maintenance

### *at a glance*

Inmate idleness in Florida's prisons remains a problem since our 2000 report. Although work and education programs help prisons manage inmate populations, funding shortfalls have resulted in eliminating many academic, vocational, and substance abuse programs. Currently, one-third of inmates lack meaningful work assignments.

Revised correctional officer training designed to reduce turnover has produced better trained officers, but had little effect on turnover. Although officers who leave prior to one year are required by law to reimburse the state for their training costs, the department's recovery of monies is low and has improved only slightly since our last review.

The department needs to better coordinate its construction and program activities to ensure prudent construction decisions. The department has not adopted formal site selection criteria for locating prisons. However, use of prototype designs has helped the department construct facilities faster and cheaper and the backlog of small construction projects has been reduced.

Although the department has taken some steps to improve its vehicle fleet management, responsibility for maintaining the \$41-million vehicle fleet is fragmented and the department lacks reliable data on vehicle maintenance.

### Scope

This progress report is one of a series of four reports that informs the Legislature of actions taken by the Department of Corrections in response to recommendations in our 2000 Justification Review, as directed by state law.<sup>1,2,3</sup>

### Background

The Department of Corrections' mission is to protect the public in two ways: by incarcerating and supervising offenders and by rehabilitating offenders through work, programs, and services. The department is responsible for all prisoners sentenced to terms of incarceration of one year or more.<sup>4</sup> As of June 30, 2004, Florida's prison population was 81,974 inmates, housed in 56 prisons and 67 other facilities spread throughout the state.

<sup>1</sup> Section 11.51(6), *F.S.*

<sup>2</sup> *Review of the Department of Corrections*, OPPAGA [Report No. 00-23](#), December 2000.

<sup>3</sup> *More Efficient Use of Probation Officers and Prioritization of Victim Restitution Needed*, OPPAGA [Report No. 04-58](#); *Corrections Education and Rehabilitative Programs Significantly Reduced*, OPPAGA [Report No. 04-59](#); *Inmate Health Care Consolidation Progressing; Privatization Requires Agency Vigilance*, OPPAGA [Report No. 04-61](#).

<sup>4</sup> Offenders with shorter sentences serve their time in county jails.

### Exhibit 1 Most Inmates Are in Correctional Institutions

Facility Summary	Total	Inmate Population	Percentage of Population
Correctional Institutions	56	69,302	84.5%
Work Release Centers	24	2,292	2.8%
Road Prisons	5	411	0.5%
Work Camps, Stand Alone Forestry Camps	36	9,762	11.9%
Treatment Centers	2	155	0.2%
<b>Total Facilities</b>	<b>123</b>	<b>81,922</b>	<b>99.9%</b>
Contract Jail Beds		52	0.1%
<b>Population Total</b>	<b>123</b>	<b>81,974</b>	<b>100.0%</b>

Source: Department of Corrections Bureau of Research and Data Analysis.

The department assigns inmates to these facilities according to a classification system that is based on several factors, including the crimes they have committed, the length of their sentences, their medical needs, and the needs for programs such as substance abuse.

For Fiscal Year 2004-05, the Legislature appropriated over \$2 billion to the department of which \$1.3 billion was allocated to security and operations. The Security and Institutional Operations Program employs over 19,000 workers, most of whom are certified correctional officers.

## Current Status ---

### Inmate Idleness

Effective inmate management is essential to maintaining control of correctional institutions. Florida prisons typically house more than 1,000 inmates, with about 40 correctional officers on duty at any given time. Since gaintime has been reduced, the most significant component of inmate management is work and program assignments.

#### *Due to shortage of work and program assignments, idleness remains a problem*

Our 2000 review noted that the department did not have enough work and program assignments to keep all of its inmates busy for 40 hours each week. As a result, over 18% of inmates had idle time not only on the evenings

and weekends, but during the day. Expanding the number of work assignments was problematic, as the department had already maximized institutional work assignments such as laundry and grounds keeping as well as work squads such as road crews and assignments to the prison industries program. We recommended that the department take steps to expand educational, vocational, and substance abuse programs to reduce both idleness and recidivism, and recommended that the Legislature consider authorizing the department to spend up to 1% of the inmate canteen profits to purchase recreational equipment.

Since 2000, inmate idleness has doubled from 18% to 33%. The department has experienced a steady increase in inmate population but an overall decrease in assignments for inmates, as shown in Exhibit 2. Due to state revenue shortfalls, the Legislature has reduced education and program funding and the department has eliminated many of its academic, vocational, and substance abuse programs. As a result, there are now fewer meaningful assignments for inmates to occupy their time. In addition, as reported in our 2003 review of the Prison Rehabilitative Industries and Diversified Enterprises (PRIDE) Program, the number of prison jobs is also declining and in 2002 only 2.7% of inmates worked in PRIDE programs.<sup>5</sup>

### Exhibit 2 Number of Inmates Needing Work Has Doubled Since 2000

Assignment Status	Number of Prisoners as of	
	June 2000	June 2003
Total prison population	71,233	77,310
Prisoners available for assignment	55,476	60,436
Work/program assignment available	44,995	40,359
<b>Total additional assignments needed</b>	<b>10,481</b>	<b>20,077</b>

Source: Department of Corrections.

While the rise in inmate idleness is troubling, it has not resulted in greater security problems. The number of inmate disciplinary reports has not substantially increased over the past three years, although correctional officers report that

<sup>5</sup> PRIDE Benefits the State But Needs to Improve Transparency in Operations, OPPAGA Report No. 03-68, December 2003.

effective inmate management is more difficult with the reduced number of programs and limited incentives for good behavior.

## Staff Training and Retention

The department has had a long-term problem hiring and retaining trained security officers. Some turnover is inevitable, as some persons train to become correctional officers but find, once they report for duty inside an institution, that they are not suited for the work. Other officers leave because counties also need correctional officers and often pay higher salaries than the state. However, turnover is costly as the department often must hire untrained staff and pay them while they train at state expense.

### *Training is now better geared to correctional officers, but has not reduced turnover*

The department sought to reduce turnover and training costs by developing a training program more specific to correctional officers. Florida's training of all law enforcement officers, including correctional officers, includes police skills and techniques not specific to correctional work.

The department proposed to the Criminal Justice Standards and Training Commission that correctional officer training hours be shortened and supplemented with a formalized on-the-job training module designed specifically for correctional officers. While the commission did not approve reducing the number of training hours, it did approve changes in how correctional officers are trained. The department has implemented the COBRA training program (Correctional Officer Basic Recruit Alternative) that maintains the required 532 hours of certification training required of all law enforcement recruits. However, 160 of these training hours are tailored to working in Florida prisons. Recruits spend the last four weeks of their training in a state correctional facility so that they can see and learn firsthand what life as a correctional officer is like. This helps better prepare them to start work in a prison once they graduate from the academy.

The department had hoped that in addition to getting officers who were better trained for work in prisons, COBRA would reduce turnover because it is not designed to prepare trainees for work in traditional law enforcement positions such as police departments. However, turnover has not been reduced as local law enforcement agencies recruit COBRA trainees to work in county jails. Consequently, retention of corrections officers remains a problem. On average, the agency loses 32% of its correctional officers by the end of the first year of employment, 45% after the second year, and 51% after the third year.<sup>6</sup> The Legislature has made an effort to reduce turnover by increasing correctional officer salaries by 4.5% in 2001, 2.5% in 2002, 2% in 2003, and 5% in 2004.

### *Agency recovery of training monies owed the state has increased only slightly*

In recognition of the tendency for officers to leave after a short time, the 1974 Legislature authorized the department to require employees who leave within 12 months of being hired to reimburse the state for training expenses. Our 2000 review found that only a small portion of new hires reimbursed the state. We recommended that the department collect these training costs, as directed by law. In 2003, the Legislature amended the law to apply the reimbursement requirement to officers who leave the state prior to two years of service, instead of one.

While the impacts of the 2003 change cannot yet be fully evaluated, Exhibit 3 shows that the department has made only modest percentage gains in recovering its training costs since 2000. Over this period, the department pursued recovery of training costs for only 49% of the former corrections officers that were subject to the requirement, and it collected only 18% of the monies that it assessed.

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<sup>6</sup> These figures are for recruits who were hired in the fiscal year ending in 2001 and tracked through 2003, the most recent data available.

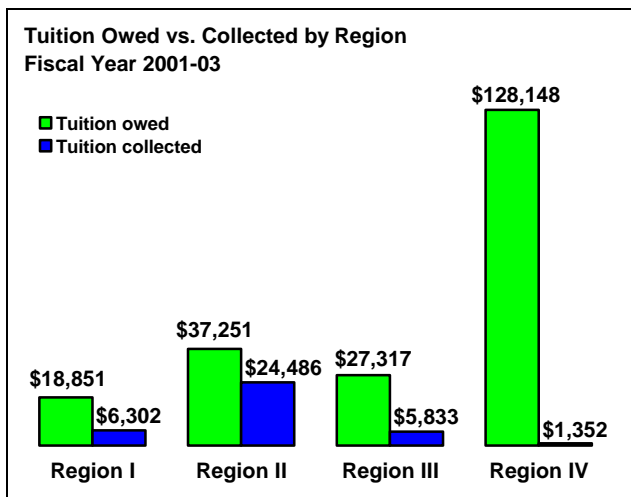
**Exhibit 3  
More Money Collected, But Recovery Rate Remains Low**

	2000 Report		FY 2001-03	
Amount owed	\$99,467		\$211,567	
Amount and percentage recovered	\$9,158	9%	\$37,973	18%
Number of officers owing training costs	104		168	
Number and percentage from whom full or partial payment recovered	18	17%	43	26%

Source: Department of Corrections records for Fiscal Years 2001-03.

One reason for the department’s low recovery of training costs is that its regions vary greatly in their collection efforts. As shown in Exhibit 4, the percentage of training costs recovered varied greatly among the department’s four regions, ranging from 66% to 1%. Region IV in particular had a low recovery rate. During Fiscal Years 2001-02 through 2002-03, over half (61%) of all training costs subject to recovery were generated in Region IV, yet the region recovered only 1% of these funds.

**Exhibit 4  
Regional Collections Vary**



Source: Department of Corrections records for Fiscal Years 2001-03.

Department staff assert that training funds are difficult to collect because there is little consequence for non-payment, other than to be asked to pay. While the law authorizes the department to institute civil action against

employees to collect monies, it has not routinely done so. The department should determine the cost-effectiveness of instituting civil action, and explore options such as using collection agencies to collect the debts. Given the expanded statutory authority to recover training and salary costs, the potential recoveries can be significant; for example, the department spent over \$1,461,000 in salaries for correction officers who quit during Fiscal Years 2001-03.

**Prison Facilities**

Keeping prison costs low requires cost-effective planning and prudent prison construction decisions. Correctional planning staff need to consider how changes in department programs (security and institutions, medical services, community control, and educational programs) affect the delivery of other programs. For example, consolidating inmates by security risk or health affects the number and type of facilities needed.

***Coordination among program activities essential for prudent decisions***

Our 2000 report noted that department planning was often fragmented and there was limited sharing of information and discussion between programs of the implications of policy changes. We recommended that the department develop a coordinated approach to policy development and a comprehensive planning process for facilities.

The department has taken steps to improve its coordination among program areas. For example, the deputy secretary now holds regular meetings of all program managers so that they keep each other informed about issues affecting prison operations, medical care, transportation, security, and other program areas.

***The department has not adopted a formal comprehensive planning process***

The department has not yet developed a comprehensive plan or planning process for facility planning, or designated a position to coordinate these activities. A formal comprehensive facility planning process would ensure that the department builds what is needed,

where it is needed, when it is needed, and at the lowest possible cost. Comprehensive planning also should address the use, expansion, and renovation of existing facilities. Currently the department does not have procedures for determining bed configuration or siting new facilities or a position to coordinate these activities.

OPPAGA's reviews of private prisons have noted that the department often spent more to prepare donated prison sites than vendors spent preparing purchased sites.<sup>7</sup> We recommended that the department develop site selection criteria for new prisons based on acquisition and preparation costs, estimated construction costs, the labor pool available for staffing, and the mission and population of the prison.

Often officials want to create jobs in economically depressed areas but may have limited understanding of cost-effective sites. The lack of formal site selection criteria leaves the department vulnerable to such influences. Developing formal site selection criteria would help officials better select potential sites as well as aid the department in evaluating such proposals and thus help place new correctional facilities in the most practical and cost-effective locations.

### ***Prototype designs help the department construct facilities faster and cheaper***

Our 2000 review recommended that the department use prototype building designs to lower construction and future maintenance costs. The department has implemented this recommendation with considerable success.

During the 2003 Special Legislative Session, the Legislature provided the department a supplemental appropriation to build 14 open bay dorms at various sites in order to provide the number of prison beds needed to meet an unexpected increase in the number of offenders being admitted to prison. The department

began an aggressive building program to complete all the new dorms by May 2004.

The department attributes the use of prototype designs to helping it construct the 14 dorms in record time. Each of the dorms was completed in May 2004, with most completed a month earlier than initially projected. Using a prototype design lowered design and construction costs, allowed for quicker construction timeframes, and enhanced improvements for the next round of buildings. Construction managers also cited the advantage of prototype designs in helping them to avoid change orders and lower costs. The use of the department's prototypical design for the new Franklin Correctional Institution is projected to save \$3.7 million over the initial greatest maximum project budget of \$39.7 million.

### ***The department has reduced its backlog of small construction projects***

Our 2000 review noted that the department's small construction projects were languishing. The department had 326 small fixed capital outlay (FCO) construction projects worth \$129.4 million that had been approved or started but not completed; 99 of these projects were over five years old. We concluded that since the projects were not a priority, many could be eliminated and the expense avoided.

The department has worked to resolve the delays in its small construction projects. The department has completed 668 FCO projects since 2000, including most of the projects that were outstanding at the time of our 2000 report. The department attributed catching up on the FCO projects to moving construction project administrators from the central office to the regional field offices as part of its reorganization plan, which provided better supervision of FCO projects. Field staff are now required to provide monthly project status reports to the central office showing the percentage of each project completed and projected completion dates. This has allowed central office construction managers to better monitor project progress and take corrective action when problems are identified, resulting in lower costs and more timely project completion. The department has recently

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<sup>7</sup> *Private Prison Review: South Bay Correctional Facility Provides Savings and Success; Room for Improvement*, [Report No. 99-39](#), March 2000; *Private Prison Review: Lake City Correctional Facility Experienced Start-Up Problems, But It Has Improved*, [Report No. 99-33](#), February 2000; *Review of Bay Correctional Facility and Moore Haven Correctional Facility*, [Report No. 97-68](#), April 1998; and *Follow-up Report on Gadsden Correctional Institution*, [Report No. 97-56](#), March 1998.

reassigned the central office engineering staff to regional offices to further facilitate project construction throughout the state.

## Vehicle Fleet Management

Vehicles represent a substantial investment and operating expense. It is important for agencies to manage their vehicle fleets through steps such as providing needed preventive maintenance in order to prolong vehicles' useful lives and provide good stewardship of taxpayer monies. Effective management of the department's vehicles is also important because many (41%) of the agency's vehicles are used to transport inmates between institutions, and breakdowns increase the risk of inmate escapes that could create dangers to the public.

As shown in Exhibit 5, the department operates 2,887 vehicles with an acquisition cost of \$41 million. Many of the vehicles are relatively old and have high mileage.

### Exhibit 5 Corrections' Vehicle Fleet Is Large and Aging

#### Quick facts about the agency's fleet

Acquisition costs of the fleet	\$41.0 million
Annual maintenance costs	\$1.5 million
Number of vehicles in the fleet	2,887
Average vehicle age	11 years
Average odometer miles	107,220
Average miles driven per year	8,098

Source: Equipment Management Information System, Calendar Year 2003.

### *Some fleet management practices have improved*

Our 2000 review concluded that the department needed to substantially improve its fleet management. The department could not accurately identify the number of vehicles it owned, had between 500 and 800 surplus vehicles that were overdue for disposal, was not tracking important fleet information on the state Equipment Management Information System, and was not taking advantage of volume

maintenance and repair discounts. We recommended that the Legislature not appropriate additional funds for vehicles until the department improved its fleet management practices.

The department has taken steps to improve its fleet operations. It has conducted a vehicle audit to identify the status of its vehicle fleet, and sold 599 nonfunctioning vehicles at auction or for scrap, and used the proceeds (\$108,357) to purchase new vehicles. The department also has standardized vehicle assignment with job function, thereby enabling the fleet manager to better identify the best mix of vehicles in the fleet, project the types of vehicles needed, and lower maintenance and repair costs through economies of scale. The department also has achieved moderate savings on parts and repairs by getting some vendors to provide the "mechanic's price" for parts and buying tires and batteries on state contract.

However, additional steps are needed to further improve the department's vehicle management. Specifically, the department should provide centralized oversight of the vehicle fleet maintenance and improve its use of vehicle information systems.

### *Decentralization has diffused accountability for maintaining the \$41-million fleet*

When the agency's current administration assumed leadership in 2002, it removed fleet maintenance responsibilities from the central office fleet manager and placed these responsibilities with regional fleet superintendents in the four regions. One of these superintendents reports to 14 wardens, while another reports to a regional manager, and the remaining two report to assistant wardens.

This decentralization and reporting structure hinders effective vehicle maintenance. Wardens are not trained or skilled in managing a multi-million dollar fleet of vehicles; their focus is security. Department records indicate that under the current decentralized system many vehicles are not receiving needed preventative maintenance services.

When fleet maintenance was centralized, the manager's overview of statewide practices enabled him to identify recurring problems that otherwise might have been considered a series of unrelated and isolated events. For example, statewide, batteries in vehicles used for perimeter patrol were starting to crack, melt, and explode. This was due to the vehicles being driven 24 hours a day seven days a week at 15 miles an hour while patrolling prison perimeters. By moving the battery from under the hood and attaching a cable so the battery could rest in the bed of the truck, the agency was able to reduce battery replacement costs statewide. With a decentralized system of assorted wardens and regional managers in charge of fleet maintenance, it is doubtful such efficiencies would have been realized.

Best practices identified by the U.S. Government Accountability Office (GAO's) found that fleet management is most effective when it is centralized.<sup>8</sup> Centralized fleet management promotes economies of scales and enables management to better evaluate fleet cost and performance, identify opportunities for improvement, and select the most cost-efficient sources of vehicles and fleet services. With a \$41-million investment in nearly 3,000 vehicles, the department should centralize the maintenance function.

***Fleet management is hampered by the agency not using available management information systems***

Another best practice for fleet management identified by GAO was the use of a high-quality management information system. Florida's state agency fleet managers are already provided such

a tool with the Equipment Management Information System (EMIS) developed by the Department of Management Services. EMIS is a computerized information system that can be customized to provide virtually any information a fleet manager would want to know.

Department officials reported that data in the system is inaccurate because staff often do not enter required data into EMIS due to time constraints. However, in the absence of reliable data, the department lacks the capability to ensure that vehicles are getting needed repairs, generate information on direct and indirect vehicle operating costs, and determine how productive its maintenance service centers are, all of which can be provided by EMIS. We believe that with over 20,077 inmates lacking work assignments, the department could use inmate labor to maintain the EMIS database, thereby providing valuable information to the department while helping to address the inmate idleness problem. For security purposes, inmates could enter EMIS data on computers that were configured so that inmates had access only to a screen and keyboard, but no hard drive.<sup>9</sup> The Department of Management Services, which maintains the EMSI system, does not object to this idea and believes its system is sufficiently secure for inmates to perform this function. Monies for these computers could be obtained from \$96,000 the agency expects to receive from vehicles it plans to surplus over the next two years.

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<sup>8</sup> GAO Report to Congressional Requestors, *Federal Motor Vehicles: Private and State Practices Can Improve Fleet Management*, United States General Accounting Office, December 1994.

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<sup>9</sup> This would be possible by equipping personal computers with emulator software that essentially deprives the user of access to a hard drive. In effect, the computer is only capable of being used for data entry purposes. In the 1980s this technology was referred to as "dumb terminals."

## *The Florida Legislature*

# *Office of Program Policy Analysis and Government Accountability*



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