*Welcome to LLA Reports, a podcast produced by the Louisiana Legislative Auditor’s office. This podcast is intended to be an oral representation of the written report it highlights and is primarily for the use of the Louisiana Legislature.*

This is Emily Dixon. I’m a manager for LLA’s Performance Audit Services. This episode of LLA Reports focuses on our new report titled “Elderly Protective Services.”

The purpose of this audit was to evaluate the Governor’s Office of Elderly Affairs’ oversight of cases of elder abuse and neglect in its Elderly Protective Services – or EPS – program.

We found that EPS may not be receiving all reports of elder abuse and neglect because it does not answer calls outside of regular business hours, allow for online reporting, or provide information on reporting options for callers who have hearing or speech impairments or language barriers.

In addition, EPS has not developed sufficient criteria to help ensure that its intake staff make consistent and appropriate decisions about which cases are eligible for assistance and which cases need to be rejected and referred to other entities when necessary.

We also found that EPS needs to develop clear, detailed guidance on what circumstances may require an escalated response priority for a case.

We found as well that EPS did not always meet required timeframes when assigning reports of abuse and neglect or investigating and closing cases.

For example, we reviewed 92 cases and found that, due in part to temporary policy changes in response to the COVID-19 pandemic and insufficient staffing, EPS did not assign reports for investigation within the required timeframes for 18 cases, and did not contact clients within required timeframes in 39 cases.

We found, too, that EPS policy did not detail investigation procedures for physical abuse and neglect cases that involved a client’s death. As a result, EPS did not always notify coroners when clients died during investigations or follow up on causes of death to determine whether the cases should have been forwarded to law enforcement for further investigation.

During fiscal years 2018 through 2022, more than 1,900 of 22,172 cases closed by EPS involved client death. In addition, unlike other states, Louisiana does not have a specialized team to review suspicious elder fatalities.

Additionally, EPS did not always develop service plans to address each problem identified during case investigations as required by policy and did not always follow up on service plans to ensure clients received the services they needed.

We also found EPS faced significant challenges, including low staffing and funding levels, high caseloads, and an ineffective data system. As a result of insufficient staffing, EPS caseworkers had an average monthly caseload of 85.6 cases during fiscal years 2018 through 2022, which is higher than those of at least 36 other states.

In addition, EPS’ current data system does not allow management to effectively monitor for program compliance and performance. While EPS has been working with the Office of Technology Services to develop a new system, the implementation the system has been delayed, and it is unclear whether it will meet all of EPS’ needs.

As a result of our report, we developed 20 recommendations and one matter for legislative consideration.

We suggested the Legislature consider establishing an Elder Abuse Fatality Review Team to further review suspicious deaths of elderly individuals in Louisiana.

Seven of our recommendations focused on GOEA’s reporting and intake processes for suspected elder abuse cases, while three recommendations were related to determinations of response priority and need for emergency medical services.

Four other recommendations dealt with case assignments and reviews, and notification of appropriate authorities when clients died.

Two more recommendations were related to service plans, two recommendations focused on staffing caseloads, and two final recommendations had to do with a new data system for EPS.

As part of its response, which is included in the report as Appendix A, GOEA agreed with 19 of our recommendations and disagreed with one recommendation.

*We hope you found this podcast informative, and that you’ll follow future episodes of LLA Reports.*

*This podcast was created as part of the audit report just discussed and is intended primarily for the use of the Louisiana Legislature. Both the full report and the podcast can be found on the LLA’s website at* [*www.lla.la.gov*](http://www.lla.la.gov)*.*

*Thank you for listening.*