*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 Chris Magee. I’m the Data Analytics Manager for the Legislative Auditor’s office. This episode of LLA Reports focuses on our report titled “Reliability of Data in the Sex Offender and Child Predator Registry.”

The purpose of this report was to evaluate whether data in the Sex Offender and Child Predator Registry is reliable. We conducted the audit because of inconsistencies we saw in sex offender data during the course of other audits and because other states – like Georgia, Missouri, and Vermont – have identified issues with the completeness and accuracy of their sex offender registries.

In addition, a report released by our office in 2008 found problems with the completeness and accuracy of the registry because of the fragmented registration process, and because state law did not give any one entity the authority and responsibility to ensure the registry was complete and accurate.

The question about whether the data in the registry is reliable is important because inaccurate and incomplete information can result in the public not being aware of the location or existence of sex offenders in particular areas. Law enforcement agencies also use the information to help in their investigations of sex crimes.

In Louisiana, multiple agencies play a role in registering sex offenders. The Department of Corrections pre-registers adult sex offenders before they are released from prison, or when they are sentenced to probation. Sex offenders must then register in-person with local law enforcement agencies, such as the parish sheriff’s office or the municipal police department – also known as managing agencies.

The managing agencies are supposed to enter all required information into the registry, such as the person’s name, sex, registration dates, offense, and so forth. The Louisiana State Police – or LSP – is then responsible for sending the information to the National Sex Offender Public Registry.

In addition, one year before a sex offender’s registration period ends, the Sexual Predator Apprehension Team in the Louisiana Attorney General’s Office verifies the end date is correct.

During our audit, we did find that all sex offenders we reviewed who should have been registered were in the registry. However, we identified multiple issues with how the managing agencies enter and document their registration activities and with the reliability of certain data.

For instance, we found that although multiple agencies register and enter data on sex offenders, no single agency is responsible for ensuring the data is reliable. While LSP has developed some processes to validate the data, and the Sexual Predator Apprehension Team has issued guidance on how to enter data, neither entity can require the managing agencies to follow the guidance or to correct data issues.

As a result, managing agencies did not always enter data into the registry consistently and in accordance with recommended guidance. Our 2008 audit report also cited this concern, but no changes were made to state law to address it.

We also found that the managing agencies did not always assign sex offenders to the correct tier in the registry. The tiers are important because they provide information to the public on how severe the sex offense was and dictate how long a sex offender remains in the registry. However, 48 of the 79 sex offenders we reviewed were assigned to a tier not supported by court documents or other documentation in the registry.

In addition, we found that the registration dates were not always entered correctly, which could result in sex offenders registering, paying fees, and remaining under managing agencies’ supervision for longer than what is required by their offense.

We found as well that managing agencies did not always document when or if sex offenders updated their information in the registry, as required by law. Twenty-one of 30 sex offenders we reviewed did not have updates documented in the registry, which is important to show the public that sex offenders are complying with state law.

Sex offenders’ employment data and deceased status also were not always correct in the registry. For example, we found that 19 of 25 sex offenders we reviewed had a job that was not listed in the registry, and that 54 of 11,312 sex offenders listed were actually deceased.

To better ensure the information in the registry is correct, LSP and other managing agencies could use information such as employment data from the Louisiana Workforce Commission and death data from the Louisiana Department of Health for comparison.

We also identified some challenges the managing agencies face in enforcing the sex offender registry laws, including insufficient funding and enforcing community notification requirements for indigent sex offenders.

As a result of our audit, we suggested three matters for legislative consideration related to the state laws governing the registry. These included the suggestion that the Legislature consider designating one entity – such as LSP – to be responsible for ensuring the accuracy of the registry, that the Legislature consider requiring the managing agencies to use the registry’s electronic system as their primary means of documenting and enforcing the sex offender law requirements, and that the Legislature consider adding some provisions to the registry laws related to indigent sex offenders, particularly concerning payment for community notifications.

We also made several recommendations to help the LSP ensure the accuracy and reliability of the data in the Sex Offender Registry.

These include a recommendation that LSP develop a way to systematically review the tiers sex offenders are assigned to by the managing agencies, that LSP create registry edit checks to ensure that the correct registration start and end dates for an offender are entered into the registry, and that LSP get access to the Louisiana Workforce Commission’s database to check sex offenders’ job information and other databases to help ensure the accuracy and completeness of the registry.

In their response to our report, which is detailed in the report appendix, LSP officials agreed that improvements in the registry could be achieved, but said they did not have the statutory authority or the personnel to effect our recommendations. In addition, LSP officials agreed with our suggested matters for legislative consideration but indicated they did not wish to be the agency responsible if the changes were adopted.

Ultimately, the goal of our audit was to help the agencies involved improve the accuracy and completeness of the state’s Sex Offender and Child Predator Registry.

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.*