*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 Krista Baker-Hernandez. I’m a manager with LLA’s Performance Audit Services.

This episode of LLA Reports focuses on our new report titled “Use of Room Confinement/Isolation in Juvenile Detention Centers and Secure Care Facilities.”

The purpose of this audit was to provide information on how juvenile detention centers and secure care facilities used room confinement and isolation to discipline youth housed in these entities during calendar years 2019 and 2020.

We conducted this audit in response to House Resolution 50 of the 2021 Regular Legislative Session.

The Louisiana Department of Children and Family Services – or DCFS – licenses the 13 juvenile detention facilities in the state and establishes statewide standards for them. The Office of Juvenile Justice – or OJJ –oversees the youth who have been assigned to one of Louisiana’s six secure care facilities.

Louisiana’s juvenile detention standards allow the use of room confinement for up to 72 hours and for disciplinary reasons.

We found 6,188 instances of room confinement involving at least 1,318 youth in 2019 and 2020. The average length of confinement was 20.7 hours.

However, detention centers across the state document room confinement differently and do not always include required information. We found some instances in which room confinement exceeded 72 hours, while some detention centers did not include sleep time in their calculation of room confinement duration, which makes their confinement duration shorter than centers that do.

The most common reason for room confinement was youth-on-youth fighting and physical aggression, and most instances involved 16-year-old black males. Youth-on-youth fighting and threats or violence toward staff accounted for about 35 percent of the confinements.

However, the detention centers also used room confinement to punish lesser negative behaviors, such as failure to follow instructions and disruptive behavior. These instances accounted for slightly more than 37 percent of the confinements.

Unlike detention centers, which are licensed and must follow standards, no laws or regulations govern the use of room confinement in secure care facilities. OJJ has developed policies that allow extended behavioral intervention for up to seven days – or 168 hours.

According to OJJ policy, youth who engage in riotous behavior, major property damage, aggressive and intentional assaults on other youth or staff, escapes or attempted escapes, and other similar behavior are placed in extended behavioral intervention.

We found 751 instances of room confinement involving approximately 217 youth in 2019 and 2020. The average length of room confinement was 137 hours.

In August 2020, OJJ changed its policy from a maximum of eight hours of room confinement to a maximum of seven days, or 168 hours. However, we found that more than 33 percent of the confinements that occurred after the policy change exceeded seven days.

The most common reasons for room confinement in secure care facilities were threats, cursing or violence toward staff, and disruptive behavior.

We were unable to determine what behavior led to room confinement at the Swanson-Monroe secure care facility because youth there destroyed confinement records. Most instances of room confinement involved 16-year-old black males.

As a result of our audit, we developed five recommendations for DCFS and three recommendations for OJJ.

We recommended that DCFS consider developing a standard form for all detention centers to use to document room confinement information. We also recommended that DCFS consider revising Juvenile Detention Standards to comply with recommended practices that state youth should be returned to regular programming as soon as possible.

We recommended as well that DCFS ensure that the juvenile detention centers’ written policies and procedures comply with Juvenile Detention Standards and that actual room confinement practices comply with these written policies and procedures.

In addition, we recommended that DCFS consider revising Juvenile Detention Standards to require the detention centers to collect electronic data on the use of confinement and report it to DCFS on a regular basis.

Finally, we recommended that DCFS consider revising Juvenile Detention Standards to comply with best practices that recommend using room confinement only as a last resort to protect youth from harming themselves, hurting others, or causing significant property damage.

We recommended that OJJ limit the use of room confinement as recommended by best practices, ensure the information the agency provides to the Performance-based Standards program includes all instances of room confinement, and put information about room confinement and extended behavioral intervention on the OJJ website.

As a part of its response, which is included in the report as Appendix A, DCFS agreed with the five recommendations we made for the agency. OJJ agreed with two of the three recommendations we made for the agency and disagreed with one.

*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.*