*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 LLA’s Performance Audit Services. This episode of LLA Reports focuses on our new report titled “Justice Reinvestment Initiative – Challenges and Impact.”

This report provides the results of our evaluation of the Justice Reinvestment Initiative – or JRI – from its inception in October 2017 through June 2023.

Between October 2017 and June 2022, JRI produced $152.7 million dollars in cumulative savings. Under state law, that money is divided among the Department of Corrections – or DOC, the Office of Juvenile Justice – or OJJ, the Louisiana Commission on Law Enforcement – or LCLE, and, beginning in 2024, the Louisiana Community and Technical College System – or LCTCS.

The purpose of this audit was to determine what challenges Louisiana has faced in fully implementing JRI reforms, what effect JRI has had on incarceration trends in Louisiana, what performance metrics exist for JRI-related programs, and what the outcomes have been.

We found there is no consensus among criminal justice stakeholders on the impact of JRI, which leads to challenges in fully implementing the initiative across the criminal justice system.

These challenges include conflicting criminal justice stakeholder opinions on JRI’s impact, the lack of integrated criminal justice data systems, which limits the ability to calculate statistics and identify trends, and the COVID-19 pandemic, which closed courts and reduced programs for inmates and those on community supervision.

We also found that after JRI was implemented, the number of inmates decreased and the percentage of inmates who were violent increased, which is in line with the JRI goal of focusing prison beds on those found to be serious threats to public safety.

In addition, while the percentage of those who were released from incarceration and subsequently returned to custody was lower than the five years before JRI took effect, those who did return returned sooner than in previous years.

Those with a violent felony offense in their criminal history returned at a higher rate than those with only non-violent felony offenses. In contrast, inmates released based on JRI good time changes did not appear to return to custody at a higher rate than the overall return rate.

We found as well that DOC has not developed performance measures to determine the outcomes of JRI-funded programs and that while the percentage of inmates receiving JRI-related program services during incarceration has increased by 13.1 percentage points since fiscal year 2013, fewer than 50.0 percent of inmates participate in the programs each year.

Additionally, we found that individuals who obtained jobs after release in fields related to the career and technical education programs they participated in while incarcerated had positive outcomes. However, a low percentage of inmates appeared to get jobs in fields related to their career and technical education programs.

We also found that during fiscal years 2020 through 2023, a low percentage of youth participating in OJJ’s JRI-funded programs subsequently entered either OJJ or DOC custody. However, OJJ has not developed performance measures to determine the outcomes of JRI-funded programs.

As a result of our report, we developed three matters for legislative consideration and 12 recommendations.

We suggested the Legislature address incomplete justice data and remove existing barriers between the various agencies in the criminal justice system, where possible, to ensure information, data, and records are complete and can be shared as needed.

We also suggested theLegislature provide funding for the Integrated Criminal Justice Information System Policy Board to address incomplete data and the existing data barriers and revisit the JRI savings allocations in order to increase programs in local correctional facilities.

We recommended that DOC consider whether to increase JRI funds to local facilities to increase the availability of and participation in educational and career and technical education programs.

We also recommended that DOC ensure information on Louisiana’s statutes is accurately entered into its data system, particularly for violent offenses. If DOC identifies issues with court paperwork, it should communicate with courts to prevent future errors.

We recommended as well that DOC continue expanding its recidivism calculations to regularly compare returns based on an inmate’s most serious felony offense type and ensure that its data system maintains which Good Time Act was associated with each inmate release.

We recommended that DOC develop performance metrics and benchmarks specific to the programs it offers and use the results to determine whether it should shift resources to more effective programs.

In addition, we recommended that DOC continue to identify ways to maximize the number of inmates receiving programs, in both state and local facilities, and determine whether it should expand services available to those on community supervision.

We recommended, too, that DOC work with the Louisiana Workforce Commission to expand the wage data it can receive in order to analyze outcomes for participants in career and technical education programs.

We recommended that OJJ develop performance metrics and benchmarks for its JRI-funded programs overall, as well as for contractor monthly metrics, and track and monitor the performance of its contractors.

Finally, we recommended that OJJ collect participant-level data from its contractors in spreadsheet form so it can analyze program outcomes and participants.

As part of their responses, which are included in the report as Appendix A, DOC agreed with eight of the nine recommendations that pertained to the department and disagreed with one, while OJJ agreed with all three recommendations that pertained to it.

*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.*