

# 2025 Winnebago County Juvenile Detention Center Inspection Report

JOHN ALBRIGHT, CHIEF OF PERFORMANCE AND INNOVATION  
TIFFANY GHOLSON, ASSISTANT SUPERINTENDENT OF OPERATIONS  
ILLINOIS DEPARTMENT OF JUVENILE JUSTICE

## **Executive Summary**

The Department of Juvenile Justice (“IDJJ”) conducted an annual inspection of the Winnebago County Juvenile Detention Center on September 24, 2025, pursuant to 730 ILCS 5/3-15-2(b). There were several areas of specific improvement observed, specifically notable increases in the amount and quality of mental health programming, improvements to internal processes to reduce the amount of youth confinement, and improvement in youth school attendance.

The sections and specific requirements of 20 Ill. Adm. Code 2602, County Juvenile Detention Standards (“County Detention Standards”) noted as non-compliant are listed in the table below, while specific observations are noted in the following sections of this report. Each section of the report includes policy and practice recommendations to either gain compliance or move towards best practice. Those recommendations are combined in a second table at the end of the report.

## **Areas of Non-Compliance**

Section	Requirement
2602.170 Discipline	Room confinement shall not be used for a fixed period of time, but only until the youth is calm enough to rejoin programming without being a risk to the safety of others. . . At no time should room confinement exceed 4 hours without administrators and/or mental health staff developing an individualized plan to address the behavior.

## **Methodology**

- Interviews Conducted
  - Superintendent
  - Assistant Superintendent
  - Detention Officer (2)
  - Supervisor
  - Nurse Practitioner
  - Youth (6)
  - Educators (3)
  - Mental Health Practitioners (2)
  - Prison Rape Elimination Act (PREA) Coordinator
  
- Documents Reviewed
  - Youth Grievance Log
  - Youth Grievance Procedure
  - Youth Orientation Packet
  - Activity Schedule
  - Sample Staff Background Checks

- Sample Youth Files
- Incident Reports
- PREA Policies
- Use of Segregation Policy
- Dietary Menus
- Confinement Records
- Health Services Contract
- Sample Staff Training Records
- Winnebago Health Department Inspection
- Programming Schedule
- Fire Inspection Report
- Professional Licenses
- School Schedule
- Tornado and Fire Drill Documentation
- Sample Mental Health File
- PREA Inspection Report (3/27/25)

### **Overview**

The Winnebago County Detention Center is a 48-bed facility located in Rockford, IL. The primary programming space is a large common area that is centrally located between six primary living units (referred to as Pods A-F). The facility has a gym space just off the primary programming space, and an outdoor recreation area behind the gym. The facility has three classrooms off the main programming area. There were 25 youth detained at the time of the audit.

### **Admission Policy and Procedures**

The Winnebago Juvenile Detention Center offers 24-hour intake coverage. The facility has a PREA Coordinator who assesses youth via the Risk for Sexual Victimization tool, and all youth at the facility receive a PREA Orientation via an orientation video. Completion of the orientation is tracked by the PREA Coordinator. All youth were knowledgeable of their PREA rights based upon the youth interviews conducted. The facility successfully passed a formal PREA audit in March of 2025.

### **Personnel, Staffing, and Supervision**

The facility has strong support from the County Board, which has approved 15 positions above the amount approved and reimbursed by the Administrative Office of Illinois Courts. They have also been approved for eight additional detention officers and two supervisors by the Administrative Office of Illinois Courts (AOIC). At the time of the inspection, the facility had six detention officer openings. While staffing levels continue to be a struggle for the facility and sometimes impact youth programming, the level of impact has significantly improved over the past two years.

## **Detention Programs, Youth Discipline, and Confinement**

The facility utilizes a token economy system in which youth earn points throughout the day that accumulate and can be exchanged for incentives. Youth who are particularly successful and earn 3000 points within a two-week period can earn a special meal and activity (usually extended phone calls). They are also rewarded with a certificate.

The facility also has a formal structure in place to promote strong relationships between staff and youth. Each youth is paired with a “staff advocate.” All Detention Officers act as staff advocates. In that role, staff advocates are encouraged to have daily contact with their assigned youth and help youth establish goals and complete court reports as necessary. The existence of such a program is an effective way to promote strong relationships, engage employees in decision-making, and promote casework practices in the absence of formal positions.

The facility has maintained noticeable improvements to the use of confinement as a response to youth behavior. The behavior program includes the use of shorter timeouts to address negative behavior. When youth act out, staff utilize de-escalation and re-direction. If a youth remains escalated, they are issued a timeout that can last as short as 15 minutes. In these situations, supervisory staff check on the youth every 15 minutes until the youth demonstrates the ability to return to programming. The facility has also made improvements related to youth placed on special statuses after significantly violent behaviors. Youth placed on special statuses have regular access to the facility gym and are only confined if their behaviors are exhibiting an immediate risk to themselves or others.

The facility has also made significant reductions to the frequency of youth confinements due to staffing shortages. While there has been a reduction in youth confinements, they do continue to occur at times. As such, the facility remains out of compliance with the confinement portion of County Detention Standards, however the substantial improvement in this area is noteworthy.

### **Areas of Non-Compliance and Recommendations**

- 2602.170 Discipline states: “Room confinement shall not be used for a fixed period of time, but only until the youth is calm enough to rejoin programming without being a risk to the safety of others. . . At no time should room confinement exceed 4 hours without administrators and/or mental health staff developing an individualized plan to address the behavior.”
  - Recommendations:
    - Only utilize room confinement when youth are demonstrating they are a risk to the safety of themselves or others.

### **Medical, Health Care, and Mental Health Services**

Medical and mental health services are provided by the Rockford School of Medicine. Nursing staff are on-site for approximately three hours in the morning and two hours in the evening. A Nurse Practitioner is on-site twice a week and conducts physicals for youth detained for seven days or more.

Mental health services are provided by multiple partners. The Rockford School of Medicine subcontracts with Rosecrance who conducts court ordered psychological forensic evaluations and provides 20 hours of behavioral health services each week.

In 2023, the facility received a grant to assist in providing more mental health services. The grant is intended to cover 120 additional hours of weekly mental health coverage to permit more time for individual and group counseling. There are now three additional full-time therapists who provide coverage seven days a week, with at least one MHP on site until 8:00pm four nights per week. Freedom therapists conduct mental health assessments for all new youth and provide one on one counseling. Freedom therapists also facilitate CBT and trauma groups throughout the week, recently following the Pathways to Resilience Curriculum. In short, the volume of mental health services available to youth now far exceed County Detention Standards.

### **Education**

The facility has three full-time teachers, two of which have special education endorsements. There continues to be a strong tracking system that details the IEP needs of special education students, along with assignment completion and communication with youth home schools.

The school day runs from 9am-3pm, with an hour break for lunch. Most classes are taught via direct instruction; however, a credit recovery system (Subject.com) has been implemented over the past year. Education staff do an excellent job of tracking school attendance each day and have a mechanism that indicates the reasons for any absences, which include institutional reasons such as short staffing, absences due to school district deficiencies (i.e., teacher absences), and absences for behavioral reasons. Attendance data as well as staff and youth reports all indicate that youth attendance in school has improved dramatically over the past year . The facility is now in compliance with this portion of County Detention Standards.

### **Recommendations**

Section	Recommendations
Discipline	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Only utilize room confinement when youth are demonstrating they are a risk to the safety of themselves or others.</li></ul>