

2024 LaSalle County Juvenile Detention Center Inspection Report

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Executive Summary

The Department of Juvenile Justice conducted the annual inspection of the LaSalle County Juvenile Detention Center in Ottawa, IL on May 9, 2024, pursuant to 730 ILCS 5/3-15-2(b). While there were some strengths noted, the center was found to be non-compliant with several requirements of the 20 Ill. Adm. Code 2602 County Juvenile Detention Standards (“County Detention Standards”). The areas noted as non-compliant are listed in the table below, with specific observations noted in the following sections of this report. Each section of the report includes policy and practice recommendations offered to gain compliance and 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 may be used only as a temporary response to behavior that threatens the safety of the youth or others. . . 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
2602.230 Education	Teacher student ratios are at least 1:12 for general education and 1:8 for students with Individualized Education Programs (IEPs). Qualified special education staff are assigned to youth with special education status and special education testing is available for youth in custody.
2602.50 Admissions Procedures	Bedding shall consist of sheets, flame retardant mattress, blankets appropriate to the season of the year and a pillow. . . An initial orientation shall be conducted by a detention staff member at time of admission. . . The agency shall provide multiple internal ways for youth to privately report sexual abuse and sexual harassment, retaliation by other youth or staff for reporting sexual abuse and sexual harassment, and staff neglect or violation of responsibilities that may have contributed to the incidents. . . The agency shall also provide at least one way for youth to report abuse or harassment to a public or private entity or office that is not part of the agency and that is able to receive and immediately forward resident reports of sexual abuse and sexual harassment to agency officials, allowing the resident to remain anonymous upon request. . . The agency shall not impose a time limit on when a youth may submit a grievance regarding an allegation of sexual abuse.
2602.90 Mental Health Services	Youth with significant mental health needs shall be assessed by a qualified mental health professional. A service plan shall be developed for each youth that includes: 1) Counseling or psychotherapy to be provided; 2) Behavioral management strategies and goals; 3) Medication; 4) Protocol for monitoring youth's progress; and 5) Needed adjustments to normal detention programs and procedures.

Methodology

- Interviews Conducted
 - Director
 - Assistant Director
 - 1 Supervisor
 - 1 Juvenile Detention Officer
 - Educator
 - Wellpath Nurse
 - Wellpath Mental Health Clinician
 - 4 youth

- Documents Reviewed
 - Policy 7.02 “Use of Room Confinement”
 - Policy 16.05 “Use of Force by Staff”
 - Policy 16.06 “Use of Restraints”
 - Policy 16.07 “Display of Restraints”
 - Policy 16.11 “Motivational Learning Model”
 - Sample Youth Files
 - Sample Youth Medical File
 - Sample Youth Mental Health Documentation
 - Incident Logs
 - Daily Programming Schedule
 - Grievance Procedure
 - Grievance Log
 - Resident Handbook
 - Youth Confinement Records

Overview

The LaSalle County Juvenile Detention Center is a 16-bed facility with three living units. At the time of the audit, the facility only had four residents in custody. The facility offers in-person visitation for all youth two days (Thursdays and Sundays) per week, at least two free phone calls; with a third available if the youth does not receive a visit.

Admission Policy and Procedures

The LaSalle County Juvenile Detention Center offers 24-hour coverage for admissions. Youth property is collected, inventoried, and laundered according to standards. Youth property documentation was observed in youth files.

Since the 2022 inspection visit, the facility has discontinued the strip searches of youth. On intake, all youth receive a wand search and pat-down. Strip searches may be conducted an individualized need is

identified. However, the facility reports they have not conducted any routine strip searches since 2022. Youth interviews affirmed that strip searches are no longer being conducted as part of the routine intake process.

The updates to County Detention Standards in 2021 included the addition of Prison Rape Elimination Act (PREA) requirements, including the requirement that all youth be assessed for risk of victimization upon intake. The facility started completing these assessments in 2023, using the screening form utilized at the county jail. Assessments are completed by facility administrators. The youth orientation process is inadequate, however. Three of the four youth interviewed reported they had never heard of PREA. The one youth who had heard of PREA stated that he learned about it at a different facility. The Resident Handbook makes no mention of PREA, a youth's right to be free of sexual harassment or assault, or a way to make a report. Interviewed youth also reported they never received any kind of orientation (PREA or otherwise) from staff. Instead, they reported staff just handed them the handbook when they arrived. Furthermore, the Resident Handbook limits youth to submitting grievances within five days of when an event occurred. This is in direct violation of County Detention Standards, which strictly prohibit imposing a time limit on when a youth may submit a grievance regarding an allegation of sexual abuse.

The intake and admission period into detention can be an extremely stressful and disruptive time for youth, especially when being detained for the first time. Better care and intentionality are needed at the LaSalle County Detention Center to both orient and assess youth when they arrive.

The 2023 report cited issues with the quality of bedding in youth rooms and a facility policy that requires youth to remove pants and sweatshirts before going into their rooms at night. While the facility has purchased new mattresses that are of significantly better quality than the previous offerings, the clothing restrictions have remained. Facility administrators continue to restrict youth from having access to pants, shirts, and sweatshirts while in their room. All four youth in the facility reported feeling cold at night. While there are conditions in which it may be appropriate to restrict access to such items through a mental health crisis assessment, it is not appropriate for this to be standard practice. The 2023 report noted that attention needs to be given to the quality of youth experience when they are in their rooms. Attention to these matters is still needed in 2024.

Areas of Non-Compliance and Recommendations

- 2602.50 Admissions Procedures states: "Bedding shall consist of sheets, flame retardant mattress, blankets appropriate to the season of the year and a pillow. . . An initial orientation shall be conducted by a detention staff member at time of admission. . . The agency shall provide multiple internal ways for youth to privately report sexual abuse and sexual harassment, retaliation by other youth or staff for reporting sexual abuse and sexual harassment, and staff neglect or violation of responsibilities that may have contributed to the incidents. . . The agency shall also provide at least one way for youth to report abuse or harassment to a public or private entity or office that is not part of the agency and that is able to receive and immediately forward resident reports of sexual abuse and sexual harassment to agency officials, allowing the resident to remain anonymous upon request. . . The agency shall not impose a time limit on when a youth may submit a grievance regarding an allegation of sexual abuse."

- Recommendation:
 - Permit youth to have pants and sweatshirts in their rooms unless contraindicated for mental health reasons.
 - Update the resident handbook to include information about PREA, ways to report allegations of sexual harassment and abuse, and remove time restrictions on filing a grievance.

Personnel, Staffing, and Supervision

The facility had two administrators, five supervisory staff, and nine Juvenile Detention Officers (JDOs) employed on the date of the inspection. The small number of JDOs employed are insufficient to adequately staff the facility. The Assistant Director covers a lot of shifts and was scheduled to work the overnight shift the entire week following the inspection date. Despite the low staffing numbers, the facility has managed to avoid resorting to the use of youth confinement to address staffing deficiencies. This is largely due to the low youth population totals at the facility, however this strategy leaves very little margin for error. Administrators did get a variance from the Administrative Office of Illinois Courts (AOIC) to lower job requirement standards to increase the pool of applicants. Currently three staff are working at the facility subject to the variance.

Detention Programs, Youth Discipline, and Confinement

The facility utilizes a traditional point card and level system to manage youth behavior. Levels are determined daily and determine later bedtimes, additional snacks, and access to things like a video game system. Staff grade youth collaboratively at the end of every shift and share points with youth to give them opportunities to ask questions and promote transparency.

The facility has a well-established daily schedule that is adhered to consistently. Staff and youth reports matched the schedule provided for the audit. Every youth interviewed affirmed the consistency of the daily schedule. The facility makes frequent use of the outside area. Youth shared they can go outside for recreation daily, weather permitting, and frequently go outside during school time with the teacher for lessons and reading time. The frequent use of the outdoor area is a strength of the facility.

The facility continues to address negative youth behavior through a set of sanctions called “Special Programs.” Youth are placed on one of four special programs (called Special Programs A-D). A youth is placed on Special Program A for minor infractions and is assigned interventions such as community service or cleaning assignments. More significant negative behaviors earn further special programs, which are associated with more severe consequences. The 2022 and 2023 inspection reports cited an overuse of confinement associated with Special Program D. The facility has revised policy 7.03 “Use of Room Confinement” in a manner that is compliant with County Detention Standards and there have been no reported confinements associated with Special Program D over the past year. Both youth and staff affirmed that the use of confinement associated with a special program has not taken place. The Resident Handbook still needs revision, as it states, “For offenses dealing with major rule violations, such as battery, sexual assault, or fighting, you will serve 3 hours in your room.” This statement should be

modified to be consistent with the updates to policy 7.03, only permitting the use of confinement for as long as youth are exhibiting behaviors that are a risk to themselves or others.

The changes to facility policy and confinements associated with Special Program D are a good step, however there is still a facility practice that mandates youth remain confined for the entire day any time they choose to go to their room during any part of the programming day. This practice is well out of compliance with County Detention Standards and should be rescinded.

Areas of Non-Compliance and Recommendations

- 2602.170 Discipline states: “Room confinement may be used only as a temporary response to behavior that threatens the safety of the youth or others. . . 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:
 - Eliminate the facility practice of mandating that youth remain confined for the rest of the day when they choose to go to their rooms for any reason during the programming day.
 - Revise the Resident Handbook to reflect the changes made to Policy 7.03, “Use of Room Confinement.”

Medical, Health Care, and Mental Health Services

Medical and Mental Health Services continue to be offered by Wellpath via a shared contract with the LaSalle County Jail. Nurses are stationed in the adult portion of the facility and present 16 hours per day with a 24-hour on call nurse available. A physician is available once per week and on call as needed. Medication is administered by nursing staff and is monitored and prescribed by a physician.

The Wellpath mental health practitioner is also based in the adult portion of the facility and comes to see youth on Fridays or anytime an acute situation arises. As noted in the 2022 and 2023 inspection reports, this practice is inadequate, as many youth are not assessed until several days after admission, if at all. This is the third consecutive year that the facility has been found to be non-compliant in this area. The mental health practitioner reported that she goes to the JDC on Fridays to check-in with youth and to provide brief psychotherapy sessions (lasting approximately 15-30 minutes) as well as to conduct intake assessments for youth new to the facility. The mental health provider reported that she typically sees youth when they are in “crisis.”

In addition to the mental health provider, a non-licensed mental health professional from North Central Behavioral Services also provides therapeutic services to youth. This provider is funded through the 708 grant and serves justice-involved youth in the surrounding area and in the JDC. For the youth under his caseload, the provider typically introduces psychotherapy and behavioral health services, and provides coaching and mentoring to the youth. He also provides coaching and mentoring to youth outside of his caseload as well, running a psychoeducational group every other week that is available to all youth.

Overall, the mental health services at LaSalle JTC are inadequate. Youth are not seen timely for admission assessments and are not seen with appropriate frequency to match the acuity of their mental health concerns. The Wellpath MHP is unfamiliar with the requirements of the contract and is not fulfilling the mental health requirements dictated by County Detention Standards. Coaching and mentoring by a non-licensed provider is not an appropriate supplement to the lack of essential mental health services at this facility. This is the third consecutive year these deficiencies have been noted.

Areas of Non-Compliance and Recommendations

- Section 2602.90 Mental Health Services states: “Youth with significant mental health needs shall be assessed by a qualified mental health professional. A service plan shall be developed for each youth that includes: 1) Counseling or psychotherapy to be provided; 2) Behavioral management strategies and goals; 3) Medication; 4) Protocol for monitoring youth's progress; and 5) Needed adjustments to normal detention programs and procedures.”
 - Recommendations:
 - Implement a consistent schedule for contracted MHPs to be on-site at the juvenile detention center sufficient to address the needs of youth.
 - Provide a mental health evaluation for all youth.
 - Develop and implement individualized service plans for those youth assessed as needing services.

Education

The facility employs one fulltime licensed educator. The educator is a former volunteer at the facility who was hired in her educational capacity in August 2021. Youth do speak highly of the educator, saying she is very engaging and takes them outside for lessons whenever she can. However, the current educator only has a K-9 endorsement. Currently this educator is providing services to youth outside of her endorsement.

Youth in the facility are enrolled in Ottawa High School and either complete work delivered by their home schools or complete classes through the Edgenuity online learning platform. Special education services continue to be insufficient as noted in the 2023 inspection. There is no special education teacher available to provide services at the facility, however a position for a special education teacher was posted in June 2024 to provide 30 hours of services each week.

The facility remains non-compliant with the Education portion of County Detention Standards for the third consecutive year.

Areas of Non-Compliance and Recommendations

- 2602.230 Education states: “Teacher student ratios are at least 1:12 for general education and 1:8 for students with Individualized Education Programs (IEPs). Qualified special education staff are assigned to youth with special education status and special education testing is available for youth in custody.”
 - Recommendations:
 - Hire a special education teacher to ensure services can be provided for youth with IEPs.

- Identify a process to have a substitute teacher in the event of a teacher absence.
- Hire an additional teacher with an endorsement fitting the youth population of the facility.

Recommendations

Section	Recommendations
Discipline	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Eliminate the facility practice of mandating that youth remain confined for the rest of the day when they chose to go to their rooms for any reason during the programming day. • Revise the Resident Handbook to reflect the changes made to Policy 7.03, “Use of Room Confinement.”
Education	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Hire a special education teacher to ensure services can be provided for youth with IEPs. • Identify a process to have a substitute teacher in the event of a teacher absence. • Hire an additional teacher with an endorsement fitting the youth population of the facility.
Admissions Procedures	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Permit youth to have pants and sweatshirts in their rooms unless contraindicated for mental health reasons. • Update the resident handbook to include information about PREA, ways to report allegations of sexual harassment and abuse, and remove time restrictions on filing a grievance.
Mental Health Services	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Implement a consistent schedule for contracted MHPs to be on-site at the juvenile detention center sufficient to address the needs of youth. • Provide a mental health evaluation for all youth. • Develop and implement individualized service plans for youth assessed as needing services.