

2024 Winnebago County Juvenile Detention Center Inspection Report

JOHN ALBRIGHT, CHIEF OF PERFORMANCE AND INNOVATION
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 5, 2024, 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 operationally driven youth confinement, and infrastructure improvements. There were also noticeable improvements in the utilization of multiple programming spaces at the same time, as youth were observed engaged in education and programming in different spaces of the facility which helps to maximize youth exposure to programming. Despite these noticeable improvements, however, some areas of non-compliance remain.

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.
2602.230 Education	There shall be a minimum of five hours of instruction per day.
2602.260 Recreation and Leisure Time	At least one hour of physical recreation and one hour of additional leisure activity shall be scheduled each day.

Methodology

- Interviews Conducted
 - Superintendent
 - Assistant Superintendent
 - Detention Officer (1)
 - Supervisor
 - Nurse Practitioner
 - Youth (6)
 - Educator
 - Mental Health Practitioners (4)
 - 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
 - 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

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 26 youth detained at the time of the audit.

The facility underwent a formal PREA audit in early July and received a preliminary report with recommendations for a corrective action to be completed within six months.

Admission Policy and Procedures

The Winnebago Juvenile Detention Centers offers 24-hour intake coverage. There have been some improvements made to the admissions process since the 2023 inspection. For several years youth were brought to an off-site Winnebago County Assessment Center to be screened for admission. During this time detention officers from the facility had to provide transportation for those youth that were admitted, directly contributing to reduced staffing levels at the facility and causing youth to be confined.

Since April 2024, youth are brought directly to the facility, saving administrators from having to send detention officers off-site to provide transportation.

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.

Personnel, Staffing, and Supervision

At the time of the audit, the facility employed 29 detention officers, two administrators, and six shift supervisors. It is notable that the PREA Coordinator manages shifts when necessary. This is a slight increase from the time of the 2023 inspection. Despite this increase and the significant improvement to the admission process, youth are still regularly confined on a rotating basis due to staff coverage concerns. This is detailed later in the report.

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, help the youth establish goals and complete court reports as necessary. The program is well-established at the facility as all youth interviewed were able to identify their staff advocate. 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 successfully implemented 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. Youth behavioral confinements are tracked on “pink sheets” which are signed by supervisory staff. These changes are consistent with the requirements of the County Detention Standards and indicative of good practice. There do remain, however, some instances of confinement being used that do not comply with standards. One youth was on a “Rec Alone” status after a series of violent behaviors meaning his recreation time took place alone or with a staff member and without other youth. A youth on a status like this is not out of compliance with County Detention Standards in it of itself, however in this case there were multiple documented confinements for the youth that were out of compliance with standards. The youth had not been to the gym for multiple weeks and was not

attending school with other youth, nor was he receiving educational work to complete, which are a violation of standards.

As noted earlier in the report, the facility is utilizing youth confinement due to some operational challenges, particularly when there are not enough staff on shift. There have been some significant improvements on some of the organizational drivers of confinement since 2023, namely the changes to the intake process and much better use of programming space by permitting multiple groups of youth to program separately in different parts of the facility. Despite these improvements, the facility does still utilize operationally driven confinements at times. The supervisor on duty reported that she anticipated confinements happening later on in the day given the reduced staffing levels she anticipated in for the evening shift. Confinement documentation confirmed that there were several uses of confinement attributed to low staffing levels in the month of August.

Administrators have resolved an area of non-compliance from the 2023 Inspection Report related to practice around shutting off water to youth rooms. The facility maintenance department updated each water closet to ensure the water to the toilet can be shut off by itself, thus allowing the water in the sink to still function. Residents have drinking water available to them. Staff were trained on how to correctly shut the water off to the toilet when the resident is flooding the living unit; ensuring that water to the sink was still being supplied. Staff were trained to not shut water off if a resident threatens to flood a unit, only when the resident is actively flooding is the water to the toilet to be turned off.

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.
- 2602.260 Recreation and Leisure Time states: “At least one hour of physical recreation and one hour of additional leisure activity shall be scheduled each day.”
 - Recommendations
 - Adjust schedules to provide at least one hour of gym time for all residents, including youth on special statuses.
 - Develop and implement a method to track youth participation in physical recreation.

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 conducts court ordered psychological forensic evaluations as well as 20 hours of behavioral health services each week, which is insufficient given the volume of the youth population.

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 three full-time therapists working to provide coverage seven days a 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.

The facility is now in full compliance with the mental health provisions within County Detention Standards.

Education

The facility is budgeted for three full-time teachers; however, they were short one full-time position at the time of inspection. In between the time of the inspection and publishing of this report, a third teacher was hired and started on October 22, 2024. The two full-time teachers at the time of the inspection both have special education endorsements. There is 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) is scheduled to be implemented during the school year. As noted in the 2023 Inspection Report, 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. In May and June, youth school attendance was only 50%, with absences driven by institutional reasons and teacher shortages. In total, there was a teacher shortage on 61/174 school days in the 2023/2024 school year. While the school schedule itself is compliant with County Detention Standards, the facility remains out of compliance with this standard given the number of absences attributed to institutional reasons and teacher absences.

Areas of Noncompliance and Recommendations:

- 2602.230 Education states: “There shall be a minimum of five hours of instruction per day.”
 - Recommendation:
 - Deliver at least five hours of educational services to all youth each day, including those on special status.

Recommendations

Section	Recommendations
Discipline	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Only utilize room confinement when youth are demonstrating they are a risk to the safety of themselves or others.
Recreation and Leisure Time	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Adjust schedules to provide at least one hour of gym time for all residents, including youth on special statuses.• Develop and implement a method to track youth participation in physical recreation.
Education	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Deliver at least five hours of educational services to all youth each day, including those on special status.