

2025 Will County Juvenile Detention Center Inspection Report

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Executive Summary

The Department of Juvenile Justice conducted its annual inspection of the River Valley Detention Center in Will County on March 10, 2025, pursuant to 730 ILCS 5/3-15-2(b).

There were several areas of strength noted, particularly related to the volume of medical and mental health services available for youth. The physical quality and cleanliness of the facility is very good.

While there were some significant strengths noted during the review, some areas of non-compliance were found, some of which are repeat findings from the last four years. The sections and specific requirements of the County Juvenile Detention Standards, 20 Ill. Admin. Code 2602, ("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. Sections of the report also include policy and practice recommendations when applicable. 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. Supervisory staff shall be notified immediately when room confinement is used . . . At no time should room confinement exceed 4 hours without administrators and/or mental health staff developing an individualized plan to address the behavior.
2602.210 Visiting	Visits shall be contact visits unless specific concerns preclude contact visits for identified individuals. . . Youth shall be authorized at least one hour for each visit.
2602.230 Education	There shall be a minimum of five hours of instruction per day.

Methodology

- Interviews Conducted
 - Superintendent
 - Assistant Superintendent
 - Nurse (1)
 - Juvenile Detention Officers -JDOs (2)
 - Detention Supervisor (1)
 - Educators (2)
 - Youth (8)
 - Mental Health Professionals (5)

- Documents Reviewed
 - Policy 9.14 “Use of Force -
 - Policy 9.25 “Chemical Agents”
 - Policy 9.44 “Pod Procedures”
 - Policy 10.01 “Achievement Levels”
 - Policy 10.06 “Classification Committee”
 - Policy 10.07 “IP-Rise”
 - Policy 11.05 “Grievances”
 - Programming Schedules
 - Dietary Menus
 - Sample Employee Training Records
 - Fire Department Inspection Report (12/26/24)
 - Current Staff Roster
 - Educator Credentials
 - Mental Health Staff Credentials
 - Resident Handbook
 - Sample Youth Files
 - Individualized Programming Log
 - Collective Bargaining Agreement – Article XI
 - Mental Health Group Therapy Schedule
 - 2024 Physical Intervention and Use of Chemical Restraint Documentation
 - 2024 Youth Grievance Log and sample grievances
 - New Hire Background Check Log
 - Youth Confinement Records

Overview

The River Valley Detention Center in Will County is a 102-bed facility in Joliet, IL. The facility has two housing pods with five living units in each pod. At the time of inspection the facility had a population of 19 youth, all of which were housed amongst the living units of one of the pods. The physical condition and cleanliness of the facility continues to be strong.

Personnel, Staffing and Supervision

While the facility does have some Juvenile Detention Officer (JDO) openings, there is adequate staffing to cover the needs of youth. At the time of the inspection, the facility was staffed with a total nine supervisory positions (six shift supervisors with three specialized coordinators) and 29 JDOs. Over the past year, facility administrators and youth report staffing resources have never fallen to a point that impacted youth programming. The facility is trying to get approval for more positions from the Administrative Office of Illinois Courts (AOIC).

Detention Programs, Youth Discipline, and Confinement

The facility has multiple programming opportunities available to youth throughout the week. An art therapist holds a weekly art group with a rotation of youth. Facility staff also facilitate cognitive behavior training (CBT) programming each afternoon, based on a set of lesson plans available as resources to staff. A church group meets with youth once per week. The facility also hosts weekly movie nights.

The point and level system remains consistent from previous years, utilizing four behavior levels that are classified by colors (blue, orange, green, and purple). Privileges for higher levels include later bedtimes and other privileges. Youth can also make purchases from a commissary with points they earn. The facility added a few additional items to commissary over past year.

The facility began to offer contact visits for families twice per week at the end of 2024. There are four total days that the facility offers family visits. Two of those days are reserved for 30-minute contact visits, with two additional days of 60-minute non-contact visits. This is definitely an improvement from the last several years when only non-contact visits were offered to youth and their families. County Detention Standards require youth be authorized at least one hour for each visit. In order to come into compliance with this standard, the facility will have to extend contact visit times from 30 minutes to one hour. Also, all visits should be contact visits unless specific concerns preclude contact visits for certain individuals. The facility does provide two free phone calls to youth in accordance with County Detention Standards and permits youth to make additional phone calls in the living unit dayrooms utilizing a collect call phone system. The cost of those calls was reduced from \$.50/minute to \$.35/minute since the 2024 Inspection.

Each inspection report since 2022 has cited several issues concerning the overuse of confinement at the facility, both related to disciplinary sanctions and scheduling of employee breaks. While some changes have been made, many of these issues remain. In August of 2022, the facility implemented the use of “Individualized Programming” to work with youth who exhibit egregious behaviors. The intent is to incorporate the use of individualized assignments and the use of confinement associated with these behaviors. Youth are assigned assignment packets to complete, which are then reviewed and processed by a team before a youth is removed from the status. The use of assignments in this way continues to be a positive step for the facility. In 2024, there were 100 occasions in which youth were placed on such a plan, most of which lasted for three days.

There are two youth at the facility who have been segregated from other youth since an extraordinary incident in Spring of 2024. For much of the past year, these two youth have only interacted with one another and staff. The youth are housed together in a small living unit, and each youth is on a special schedule. The youth eat all of their meals alone, either in their rooms or in the dayroom (they are not permitted to eat together). The youth do not go to school with the other youth, instead having packets of work dropped off for them to work on, with one working in the dayroom while the other is confined in their room (this is outlined in further detail in the education section of this report). The rest of the day consists of an hour of free time together in the evening either in the Gym or another programming area. The confinements and isolation for these two youth are well out of compliance with County Detention Standards.

Each inspection report since 2022 has cited some additional concerns over the standard use of youth confinement for non-behavioral reasons. While the facility is well-staffed from a staff/youth ratio standpoint, youth are confined in their rooms for four hours per day while JDOs take breaks. Article XI of the current collective bargaining agreement states:

“Within each eight (8) hour shift, and ten (10) hour shift, each juvenile detention officer and CRT member, respectively, shall receive a sixty (60) minute break at approximately the middle of the shift. Should the employee choose, such breaks may be taken in “staff only” areas of the facility.”

Youth are confined in their rooms for two hours in the middle of the morning shift and again for two hours in the evening while these breaks occur. There have been some marginal practices implemented to attempt to mitigate this since the 2024 inspection. Art therapy and other mental health groups are conducted for two of the three living units Monday – Friday during the dayshift lockdown period, however the evening and weekend confinements for both shifts remain. With acknowledgement that there have been some attempts to mitigate these confinements, current practice is still well out of compliance with County Detention Standards which stipulate that “[r]oom confinement may only be used as a temporary response to behavior that threatens the safety of the youth or others.” This is the third consecutive year this area of non-compliance has been observed.

The facility continues to permit the use of chemical restraints (pepper spray). Per facility documentation, there were 29 uses of chemical restraints in 2024, an amount that more than doubled the number of uses the year prior. Previous inspection reports recommended changes to facility policy to affirm that the use of chemical restraints only be used as a last resort in the use of force continuum. That change has been made in policy; however the volume of chemical restraint use at the facility represents an outlier amongst the detention centers in Illinois, most of which do not utilize chemical restraints at all.

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. Supervisory staff shall be notified immediately when room confinement is used . . . 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:
 - Structure staff breaks in a way that does not cause youth confinement.
 - Only utilize confinement as a temporary response to behavior that threatens the safety of the youth or others until the youth is calm enough to rejoin programming.
 - Implement an internal review process to mitigate the use of chemical restraints.

- 2602.210 Visiting states: “Visits shall be contact visits unless specific concerns preclude contact visits for identified individuals. . . Youth shall be authorized at least one hour for each visit.”
 - Recommendations:
 - Permit youth and families to have contact visits for at least one hour per visit.
 - Ensure all visits are contact visits unless specific concerns preclude contact visits for certain individuals.

Medical and Health Care

The amount of medical and mental health resources available to youth remains a significant strength for the facility. The facility contracts with Wellpath for medical services. Nursing staff are scheduled from 7:00am – 11:30pm each day and are on-call overnight. The facility is staffed by three fulltime nurses and seven on a PRN status. A physician is available two days per week and a nurse practitioner is available one additional day per week. All youth receive a medical assessment upon intake. Medication is only administered by nursing staff and there is a process for verifying youth medication on intake and obtaining required prescriptions through a physician. The storage process for medication is strong and the medical documentation reviewed was clear and organized. The sick call process is well-established. Boxes are present on each living unit for youth to submit sick call slips. The boxes are checked twice per day.

Mental Health Services

The department has a total of two licensed psychologists, one art therapist, and a mental health professional who provide services to youth. There are also two mental health interns working at the facility. All youth receive a mental health assessment within 72 hours of intake that includes a PREA assessment. The facility utilizes both a long-form and short-form assessment. Any youth that has previous mental health contacts or concerns receives the long-form mental health assessment, the WRAT (Wide Range Achievement Test), Beck Youth Inventory, Jesness Inventory-Revised, and Personality Assessment Inventory – Adolescent version

Clinicians meet with youth on the mental health caseload weekly and provide 24-hour on-call coverage. An art therapist conducts daily groups with youth on a rotating basis, covering topics such as creating a safety plan, conflict and decision-making, and building a support system. The facility also has a process for youth to request mental health services, similar to a sick call process.

Youth Grievances

Interviewed youth were fluent in the grievance process and knew where to obtain a grievance form if needed. The facility has a policy specific to the youth grievance process and tracks youth grievances and responses via a grievance log.

Education

Educational services are provided by Joliet Township School District 204. The facility has three full time teachers, one of which is a special education teacher. Youth are administered reading and math assessments upon arrival to the facility. Teachers reach out to youth home schools in order to obtain work for the youth to complete while in detention. Educators utilize both work provided by youth homeschools and the Apex Credit Recovery System to provide services for youth.

The two aforementioned youth who are on an extended individualized programming status are not permitted to attend school with the other youth. Those two youth are required to remain in their pods during the school day, where they are brought educational packets to work on. Outside of intermittent access to a teacher when these packets are dropped off, these two youth have had minimal direct instruction from a teacher for almost an entire year. Furthermore, the youth are only permitted to work on their schoolwork one at a time in the pod dayroom and are confined when it is not their turn in the rotation. They also do not have access to the Apex System utilized by other youth. The access to education for these two youth is well out of compliance with County Detention Standards, which requires that youth receive at least five hours of educational instruction each school day.

Areas of Non-Compliance and Recommendations

- 2602.230 Education states: “There shall be a minimum of five hours of instruction per day.”
 - Recommendations:
 - Provide at least five hours of direct instruction to all youth in the facility, including those on unique statuses.

Prison Rape Elimination Act (PREA)

The facility has not undergone a formal PREA audit, however they did have a readiness audit conducted by the Moss Group in December 2024. The updated County Detention Standards include requirements in several sections related to federal Prison Rape Elimination Act (PREA) standards. The facility has implemented some of the requirements from the County Detention Standards. All new employees receive the required background check. Youth are administered a Risk for Victimization Screening upon intake in a manner consistent with standards and there is ample documentation showing employees have received training on PREA. The Resident Handbook contains a page with information on PREA that contains different ways youth can report sexual abuse or harassment, inclusive of third-party phone numbers accessible from the youth collect call system. Interviewed youth were familiar with PREA.

Recommendations

- Complete a formal PREA audit.

Recommendations

Section	Recommendations
Discipline	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Structure staff breaks in a way that does not cause youth confinement.

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Only utilize confinement as a temporary response to behavior that threatens the safety of the youth or others until the is calm enough to rejoin programming. • Implement an internal review process to mitigate the use of chemical restraints.
Visiting	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Permit youth and families to have contact visits for at least one hour per visit. • Ensure all visits are contact visits unless specific concerns preclude contact visits for certain individuals.
Education	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provide at least five hours of direct instruction to all youth in the facility, including those on unique statuses.
PREA	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Complete a formal PREA audit.