



FACT SHEET

Date: September 11, 2012

Report: 2011-129

The California State Auditor released the following report today: **Juvenile Justice Realignment**

Limited Information Prevents a Meaningful Assessment of Realignment's Effectiveness

BACKGROUND

The California Department of Corrections and Rehabilitation's (Corrections) Division of Juvenile Justice (Juvenile Justice) operates secure detention facilities, provides education and treatment to offenders under the age of 25, and houses juvenile offenders under 18 years of age. The cost to house a juvenile offender at Juvenile Justice increased to \$245,000 per juvenile in fiscal year 2008–09 following a 2003 lawsuit. As costs rose, the State began to transfer, or realign, the responsibility and expense for housing certain nonserious and nonviolent juvenile offenders who are not registered sex offenders to the counties in 2007 with the original juvenile justice realignment law. To compensate for some of these increased costs, the State established the Youthful Offender Block Grant (block grant), which is administered by the Board of State and Community Corrections (board). Counties use block grant funds on various aspects of their juvenile justice systems.

KEY FINDINGS

Our audit of juvenile justice realignment and review of four county probation departments—Los Angeles, Sacramento, San Diego, and Yuba—highlighted the following:

- The board's methodology for collecting and reporting on county data for its annual report to the Legislature and other stakeholders regarding the use of block grant funds is flawed and could mislead decision makers about the effectiveness of realignment.
 - ✓ The board does not report on the type of juvenile offenders upon whom counties frequently spend their block grant funds. Thus, the outcomes for counties that spend such funds only on high-risk offenders—those considered most likely to reoffend—would appear worse than in those that spend the funds on lower-risk offenders. Two of the four counties we visited focus such funds on their higher-risk offenders—while the others use funds on nearly all types of juvenile offenders.
 - ✓ The board's reports focuses only on juvenile offenders who have committed felonies and likely would have been sentenced to Juvenile Justice prior to realignment rather than on all types of offenders receiving block grant-funded services.
 - ✓ The board aggregates data counties submit and presents data only on a statewide level, which can obscure the trends within a given county. For example, on a statewide level, the percentage of juvenile offenders enrolled in school increased by 2 percent between two years, however, the county-level results for 10 counties contradicted this trend.
- The board does not provide sufficient guidance to the counties regarding information to track and submit and, therefore, the counties report inconsistent information to the board, which further limits the usefulness of the board's reports.
- The board does not have policies or procedures related to the administration and oversight of the block grant. Similarly, none of the counties we visited have policies and procedures related to administering the block grant.
- Despite the fact that the State has not clearly defined the goals of realignment, the four counties we visited believe realignment has been effective based on various indicators—for example, the overall juvenile crime decreased in both Yuba and San Diego counties, and all four counties asserted that they provide new or enhanced services.
- Based on the four counties we visited and the possible indicators we identified—such as reduced juvenile crime and improved services to juvenile offenders—it appears that realignment may be resulting in positive outcomes, although the data needed to assess realignment outcomes is limited—three of the four counties we visited do not have data systems that can generate the information needed to measure outcomes and we were unable to fully assess outcomes using state level data.

KEY RECOMMENDATIONS

We made some recommendations to the Legislature including that it consider revising state law to specify the intended goals of realignment and amending state law to require counties to collect and report performance outcomes and expenditures related to juvenile justice as a condition of receiving block grant funds. We also recommended that the Legislature require the board to collect and report these data in its annual report. Further, we recommended the board maximize the usefulness of the information it makes available to stakeholders by creating clear policies and procedures for outcome and expenditure reporting and that it verify the counties' data.

