

The California State Auditor released the following report today:

## Dually Involved Youth

*The State Cannot Determine the Effectiveness of Efforts to Serve Youth Who Are Involved in Both the Child Welfare and Juvenile Justice Systems*

### BACKGROUND

Dually involved youth—those involved in both the child welfare system (dependency) and the juvenile justice system (delinquency)—are said to struggle more in their early adult years than youth without cross-system involvement or even those who are aging out of the systems. In 2005 each county was granted the option of developing a dual status protocol that would designate certain youth as dual status youth, i.e., simultaneously dependents and wards of the court. Whenever a youth appears to come within the description of both systems, social workers and probation officers must work together to make the initial determination of which status (dependency, delinquency, or dual status) would best serve the needs of that youth and protect society. Both county child welfare services (CWS) and probation agencies have responsibility to provide care and treatment consistent with the youth's best interests; however probation agencies also focus on rehabilitation of youth and the protection and safety of the public.

### KEY FINDINGS

During our audit concerning dually involved youth, we visited three dual status counties and three nondual status counties and noted the following:

- State-level agencies have provided limited guidance to county agencies regarding dually involved youth and how to track data in the statewide case management system and cannot monitor this population's outcomes statewide.
  - ✓ Although the California Department of Social Services (Social Services) oversees county CWS agencies, it cannot require county probation agencies to collect data and while the Judicial Council of California (Judicial Council) was initially charged with collecting data and preparing an evaluation, the requirement only applied to the two years after the first child was deemed dual status.
  - ✓ The state has not defined key terms or established outcomes to track related to dually involved youth—the six counties we visited have different definitions for key terms such as *recidivism*.
  - ✓ County data systems lack a common identifier, like a social security number, that could be used to reconcile data that CWS and probation agencies record or to link information on youth who transfer between counties.
- Most of the six counties we visited have not tracked outcomes separately for dually involved youth or established baselines to assess the effectiveness of their efforts related to these youth, and have to rely on their own data systems instead of the statewide case management system to identify dually involved youth.
- Despite limited state guidance, four of the counties we visited are in the process of implementing best practice models, which emphasize using data to make policy and practice decisions and providing additional training to staff.
- Our review of 166 case files indicated that having dual status protocols did not appear to have a significant effect on the number of services offered or the outcomes achieved for these youth.
  - ✓ Youth in dual status counties seemed to have less juvenile justice involvement than those in nondual status counties.
  - ✓ Youth typically received a significantly higher number of services after they became wards of the court and had similar average numbers of out-of-home placements regardless of whether the county was dual status or not.

### KEY RECOMMENDATIONS

We recommended that the Legislature should:

- Require Social Services to revise its statewide case management system to enable county CWS and probation agencies to identify dually involved youth and issue guidance on how to properly use the system.
- Direct the Judicial Council to work with county agencies and state representatives to develop common data elements to collect, track, and evaluate outcomes, and to report the information to the Legislature.

We also recommended that county CWS and probation agencies designate the data system they will use for tracking youths' status and provide guidance or training to staff to ensure this data is consistently recorded.