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Audit Report
on

Youth Grievance System

April 2007

Youth Grievance System

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INTERNAL AUDIT DEPARTMENT

TO: Jay Kimbrough, Conservator
Ed Owens, Acting Executive Director, Texas Youth Commission

FROM: Karin Hill, Internal Audit Director

DATE: April 4, 2007

RE: Results of the Youth Grievance Audit

Attached is our report on the audit of the Texas Youth Commission's (TYC's) Youth Grievance system. The objective of this audit was to determine whether the youth grievance system is effective. To accomplish this, we reviewed three areas: 1) youth access/comfort in using the system; 2) timeliness and quality of resolutions; and 3) the administration of the system.

One of the youths basic rights while committed to TYC is the right to express their complaints or grievances. A systematic process with appropriate controls and reporting capabilities ensures that this right is consistently provided for and protected across the agency.

While the agency has established a grievance process and database to document and track the process, more specific guidance is needed to ensure it is operationalized consistently across the state. Differences in the number of appeals included in the process, how to address abuse of the system, and ensuring youth are provided a copy of their grievance all impact the overall effectiveness of the system. In addition, inconsistencies in the resources dedicated to administer the system can result in less timely resolution of grievances at some locations.

To determine the responsiveness of the system to the youth we evaluated the timeliness and quality of resolutions. A review of a sample of grievances identified that more than half of youth grievances filed were resolved within the agency's policy requirements. However, there are instances when meeting the 15 day policy requirement is not timely enough to provide relief for the youth. In addition, many of the resolutions to the grievances reviewed either did not address the issue being complained on or consisted of a promise of action instead of a resolution, thereby focusing on the symptoms and not addressing the cause.

Although the monitoring tool reviews for quality and timeliness of resolutions, it falls short in ensuring the process is protected. Most specifically, additional work to discuss the process with youth would provide a better indication of youth access to and comfort with the grievance system and detailed reporting to management would give them the information needed to identify and address systemic problems.

In a survey and interviews, most youth reported that they know they have the right to file a grievance and how to obtain a grievance form, but many of them do not think the system works. Furthermore, almost half of the youth surveyed and many of those interviewed indicated that staff retaliate when youth file grievances. Actual instances of retaliation could not be confirmed during this audit. Concerns such as these have led some institutions to implement an enhanced communication process between the youth and staff. Youth at these locations voiced a preference for these processes stating that it is faster and less confrontational. However, the process is often not documented and lacks accountability.

Management concurs with the results of our work and has committed to strengthening the grievance system and training staff to better implement it. We appreciate the cooperation and assistance provided to us by staff in the Central Office and the field.

This report presents the results of our audit of the Texas Youth Commission's (TYC) Youth Grievance system. The objective of this audit was to determine whether the youth grievance system is effective. Three sub-objectives were developed to meet the objective:

- Evaluate youth access/comfort in using the grievance system.
- Determine the timeliness and quality of resolutions to youth grievances.
- Evaluate the administration of the grievance system.

A number of activities were conducted to accomplish the objective to include, but not limited to: reviewing policies and procedures; interviewing Central Office (C.O.) and field staff; analyzing data from the grievance database (the Texas Youth Complaint System (TYCS)); interviewing and surveying youth; and conducting a limited "work study" which was completed by the Superintendents' Administrative Assistants.

The scope of this audit included youth complaints that were closed in fiscal year 2006 for all TYC institutions but the Al Price State Juvenile Correctional Facility. The evacuation and subsequent damage to the Al Price facility due to hurricane Rita in September 2005 resulted in a dramatic reduction of grievances filed, as well as the amount of time to resolve the grievances which had been filed prior to the evacuation, both of which would have skewed the analyses conducted for the audit.

This audit was conducted in accordance with the *International Standards for the Professional Practice of Internal Auditing* and *Government Auditing Standards*; however, is not being reported in accordance with the following standards:

- *International Standards for the Professional Practice of Internal Auditing, Standard 2410 – Criteria for Communicating: "Communications should include the engagement's objectives and scope as well as applicable conclusions, recommendations, and action plans."*
- *Government Auditing Standards, Standard 8.07 – Report Contents: "The audit report should include the objectives, scope, and methodology; the audit results, including findings, conclusions, and recommendations..."*

The audit work was completed prior to events that are resulting in the complete redesign of the Youth Grievance System. As a result of these events, the recommendations initially made in the draft report, as well as management's response to those recommendations, are obsolete. The issues discussed in this report will be addressed in the redesigned system which is planned for completion in May 2007. Not following these standards in no way impacts the results of the audit work or the integrity of this report.

One of the basic rights youth are entitled to while committed to TYC is the right to express their complaints and appeal decisions made regarding those complaints. TYC has established a complaint resolution system in General Administrative Policy (GAP) 93.31, Youth Rights and Remedies: Complaint Resolution System and GAP.93.53, Youth Rights and Remedies: Appeal to the Executive Director to provide for this right.

The youth grievance system is administered at the local level and monitored by staff at the C.O. Local coordinators enter grievances into the TYCS for tracking and monitoring and assign a Decision Authority (DA) to resolve the complaint. The Complaints Coordinator in the C.O. provides a high level of oversight and periodically reports status and trends to executive management.

Implementing a statewide process will improve the agency’s effectiveness in responding to grievances.

With responsibility for over 4,000 youth in TYC’s secure locations alone, a systematic process for filing and resolving grievances is necessary to protect the youths’ right to express their complaints. A systematic process, with appropriate controls and reporting capabilities, gives assurance that the youths’ right to complain is consistently provided for and protected throughout the agency, as well as a means of monitoring to ensure grievances are resolved

Current policy sets minimum guidelines and requires facilities to develop local procedures on implementing a youth complaint system. GAP.93.31 requires each facility and program to have a written complaint resolution procedure for youth and their parents to be submitted to the Complaints Coordinator in the C.O. for review and approval. While the policy establishes minimum requirements for resolution procedures, it does not provide enough detail to avoid differences in processes across the state. As a result, there are a number of variances between procedures implemented across the agency. For example:

- ***The number of appeals at the facility level ranges from one to three.*** The right to appeal provides youth the opportunity to take their complaint to a higher level if they are not satisfied with the resolution offered or if they do not receive a timely resolution. Policy permits youth, their parents, and others to appeal an unsatisfactory response or lack of response to a complaint to the facility, as well as to the Executive Director. While a level of appeal at the local level is desirable to assist in resolving issues and potentially reducing the number of appeals to the Executive Director, incorporating too many levels of appeal could render the process ineffective and even give the appearance of discouraging appeals to the Executive Director.
- ***Youth are not always permitted to retain a copy of the grievance form for their records.*** Grievance forms are pre-numbered and printed in two parts – one for the grievance process and the other for the youth. This allows the youth to retain evidence that he filed a grievance and provides management with a means to account for all of the forms, as well as monitor to ensure that complaints are addressed. A review of the processes in place and interviews with youth at five institutions identified varying practices in this area. While at most of the institutions youth retained their copy of the grievance forms filed, there were instances where they were required to submit both copies to help the Local Complaint Coordinator reconcile the forms collected to the TYCS. Requiring a youth to turn in his copy of his grievance

form nullifies the control established to ensure complaints are addressed by providing the youth with a copy to support appeals due to non-responsiveness.

Another difference identified concerning grievance forms was the process to ensure the youth grievance clerks have blank forms when youth need them. At most facilities a process has been established for the Local Complaint Coordinator to meet with the grievance clerks to discuss any problems and ensure they have enough forms; others encouraged the youth to write their grievances on plain paper. As with the youth not keeping a copy of the form, filing the grievance on plain paper does not provide a copy of the grievance for the youth or ensure that a tracking number will be assigned. While there are going to be times when a pre-numbered grievance form will not be available, this should be kept to a minimum.

- ***Institutions have implemented a range of consequences for youth who are determined to be abusing the grievance system.*** Addressing grievances filed by youth is time-consuming and requires the efforts of staff who have other responsibilities. When grievances appear to be frivolous or youth trying to retaliate against staff, it leads to more time and staff frustration. However, as discussed earlier, one of the youths' explicit rights is the right to express their complaints and any policy or practice that gives the appearance, real or perceived, that youth are not permitted to, or are otherwise limited in, filing grievances is potentially violating that right. One of GAP.93.31's requirements of the local policies is to include a "notice to the youth about consequences for abuse of the complaint system", a requirement which institutions ranged from not addressing at all to including specific consequences. Without exception, staff interviewed during this audit stated that youth are permitted to grieve however often and on whatever subject they choose. However, while none of the policies included disciplinary consequences for abusing the grievance system, some included placing the youth on probation or restriction and others warned of a written letter that would be given to the youth. Specifically what constitutes abuse is not defined.

While at the time of our review every institution had a policy as required, many of them had not been submitted to the C.O. for approval. The Complaint Section in the C.O. had recently been reorganized and upon being briefed on this deficiency, policies were requested by the Complaints Coordinator.

By providing guidelines and establishing a requirement for institutions to develop local procedures instead of a system to be implemented at all locations, the agency is at risk of treating youth differently based on the institution they are assigned and having inconsistent emphasis and processes that afford youth varying levels of their right to grieve. While institutions need some flexibility in operationalizing the grievance system, agency policy should establish specific requirements for the process and an expectation that they will be met.

The agency is not able to track the status of youth complaints filed in the Central Office. In addition to being able to file complaints at the facilities, youth and their

parents may file verbal or written complaints regarding youth care and their treatment directly with the C.O. When this happens, the Complaints Coordinator forwards the complaints to the appropriate facility at which time that facility assigns a local tracking number and progresses with the resolution process. Without communication of the tracking number assigned to the complaint from the Local Complaint Coordinator, C.O. staff cannot track or follow up on the grievance. Individuals filing complaints directly to the C.O. should be able to inquire about those complaints with C.O. staff. By incorporating a field to identify where the complaint was originally filed and a process to query the system by this field, the Complaints Coordinator could easily inquire about these complaints and follow up as necessary.

The resources dedicated to administer the grievance system should be reviewed.

As discussed earlier, the Local Complaint Coordinators are responsible at the facility level to administer the grievance system. Until February 2003, Youth Rights Specialists assigned to each institution administered the system. With the creation of the Inspector General Office (now the Office of Youth Care Investigations), the Superintendents' Administrative Assistant positions were reclassified and the responsibilities of the youth grievance system assigned to them. This reclassification was made without conducting a work study analysis to determine whether those individuals' workloads allowed for the addition of administering the grievance system.

The amount of resources dedicated to the grievance system varies by institution.

Although the Superintendents' assistants were reclassified to assume the duties of the Local Complaint Coordinator, additional resources were not allotted to assist them. As a result, and due to the institutions ranging from resolving 500 to more than 4,000 grievances in fiscal year 2006, the increased workload has been handled differently. At some of the institutions administering the grievance system is done solely by the Local Complaint Coordinator, while at others clerks and administrative staff throughout the facility assist, and at yet another the Local Complaint Coordinator is minimally involved and has two other staff assigned for the responsibilities.

To get an idea of how much time was being spent on administering the grievance system, we asked the Local Complaint Coordinators to track their time over a four-week period and include the time that other staff assisted with the grievance system. Analysis of this information identified that institution staff spend as few as a couple and as many as almost 80 hours a week administering the system. Further review identified that, with a couple of exceptions, the amount of time spent on these responsibilities directly correlated with the number of grievances filed.

The Local Complaint Coordinators have not received training on administering the grievance system. Training lays the groundwork for ensuring staff have the tools necessary to complete their responsibilities, as well as for establishing expectations of what will be accomplished. Without training, staff are left to do their best. The Local

Complaint Coordinators at each of the institutions visited during this audit stated that they did not receive formal training to administer the grievance system. While some of them learned briefly from the prior Youth Rights Specialist, others were left to learn the process through trial and error. A lack of training exposes a risk of the agency not being able to protect the youths' right to express their complaints because it impacts the coordinators' ability to effectively administer the grievance system. It also makes it difficult to provide guidance and feedback to staff assigned to resolve grievances, discuss the importance of allowing youth to express their complaints to new hires, and train youth grievance clerks to handle their responsibilities. All of which are essential to ensuring an effective grievance system.

One result of not ensuring the coordinators were properly trained and understood the requirements of the grievance system is that the coordinators do not consistently reconcile grievance forms issued to youth grievance clerks to grievances received. None of the coordinators at the institutions visited maintained a log to track the issuance and receipt of forms and follow up on those issued but not submitted. As a result, an opportunity exists for grievance forms to be lost or destroyed before they reach the system without the Local Complaint Coordinator's knowledge. A reconciliation and follow up process to account for all grievance forms issued to youth is essential to safeguard the youths' right to file a grievance and help ensure that complaints are addressed.

By improving responsiveness to youth grievances management could identify and potentially resolve recurring issues.

Responsiveness to grievances is measured by the amount of time it takes to respond, as well as the quality of the response given. While taking too long to resolve a grievance can be considered non-responsive, providing a response that either does not address the issues contained in the complaint at all or contains a promise to act instead of a solution also results in a failure to adequately respond to the complaint.

Resolutions do not adequately address the issues in the grievances. GAP.93.31 provides limited information as to what is expected in a resolution, but states, "A complaint is successfully resolved when the response results in corrective measures or in the provision of information that aids understanding." A review of responses to a statistical sample of grievances resolved in fiscal year 2006 identified that more than 40 percent of them either did not address the key concern(s) cited by the grievant or that the resolution was a promise of action as opposed to an actual resolution.

As discussed earlier, youth may appeal if they are not satisfied with the resolution or if they do not receive resolution at all. While the percentage of resolutions in our sample that were appealed was low, half of the appeal decisions either did not address the issues or the written appeal decision was not available for review.

When responses to grievances are not responsive, the true issue is not addressed or corrected. This can result in inconsistent treatment of like grievances, as well as allowing an issue to become more serious than it should.

While more than half of the grievances resolved in fiscal year 2006 met the time requirements in policy, improvements can be made. The effectiveness of a grievance system is largely associated with the amount of time it takes to resolve grievances. Agency policy establishes that grievances should be resolved within 15 work days of being filed and that failure to meet this requirement is considered non-responsive and enables the grievant to appeal directly to the Executive Director. Analysis of the grievances resolved in fiscal year 2006 revealed that 59 percent of them were resolved within the 15 day requirement and almost half of those not meeting the requirement were resolved within the following week.

However, in addition to how long it takes to resolve grievances, the subject of the grievance must be considered when determining whether grievances are being resolved timely or not. More than one-third (35%) of the grievances in our sample pertained to incident reports or other disciplinary actions that youth wanted removed from their records. Disciplinary actions can have an effect on phase assessments conducted for each youth once a month; a youth filing a grievance concerning such an action is looking for the resolution to be reviewed before their next assessment. As a result, with 15 work days (up to 21 calendar days) to resolve a grievance and 28 to 35 calendar days between phase assessments, it becomes clear that even if the policy requirement is met, the 15 day due date can easily expire after the youth's phase assessment, at which point the resolution of the grievance would not be considered timely by the youth who filed it.

Management has identified that grievances related to behavior and disciplinary actions are having an adverse effect on the grievance system, as well as the youths' right to due process and the need to address it. Grievances relating to behavior and disciplinary actions make up more than a third of all grievances, and to be responsive they need to be resolved prior to the grievants next phase assessment. Filing this type of grievance in the same manner as all others results in them being tracked in the same manner and delaying their resolution – possibly to the point of not being in time for the phase assessment.

The agency does not provide adequate training for resolving grievances. Upon receipt of a grievance, the Local Complaint Coordinator assigns a Decision Authority (DA) to research and resolve the grievance and communicate the results to the youth. While DAs assigned to grievances vary in job title, they are most often JCO VIs or Program Specialists (PS).

As discussed earlier, the Local Complaint Coordinators are not trained on administering the grievance system or the expectations the agency has on resolving grievances. Further review of training material relating to the youth grievance system identified that training is included in a two hour segment of pre-service training on youth rights, which is conducted for direct care staff upon being hired into the agency and is limited to telling the participants that youth have a right to file a grievance. This training segment does not

adequately discuss the youths' right to express their complaints or how to respond and is outdated in regards to who is responsible for the grievance system.

To adequately protect the youths' right to express their complaints, the agency needs to adequately train its staff, not only on the youths' rights, but also on their responsibility to protect those rights. In addition, DAs must be given the tools to meet their assigned responsibilities in resolving grievances. Specifically, training is needed to outline the agency's expectation of what an adequate resolution consists of and how to meet that expectation. Without this additional training, grievances will continue to be closed without identifying the issue or by promising action, neither of which address the issue(s) of the grievances.

Some institutions have implemented a process for youth to request to meet with specific staff. In an effort to address youth questions and concerns as efficiently as possible, improve communication between staff and youth, and address issues that should be resolvable without filing a grievance, some institutions have implemented a process for youth to request a meeting with a staff member to discuss a complaint, make a request, or seek understanding of a rule or policy instead of filing a grievance. Discussions with both staff and youth at the institutions that we visited which had implemented such a process indicated a preference for this due to it being faster and easier. Youth typically get their concerns addressed within one or two days instead of the 15 plus work days it takes to get a grievance resolved, and the number of grievances filed is reduced.

However, what makes these processes faster and easier is the lack of formality and minimal requirements for documentation. While review of documentation that was available identified that some issues that are raised through this process are of a nature that a formal grievance should not be needed, others were related to incident reports and disciplinary actions the youth was claiming were not warranted and wanted removed from their records before their next phase assessment. The process for this discussed by staff was that the staff receiving the request – typically a JCO VI or PS – would determine whether the disciplinary action was appropriate. If it was, the action remains in the youths file; if not, it is deleted from the CCS with no documentation. The ability to delete a record from the CCS without documentation reduces the agency's accountability for the information recorded in its automated system, removes management's capability to review for trends in such incidents to identify areas needing improvement or staff training needs, and is not consistent with sound records management practices.

As stated earlier, management is considering options to separate grievances related to behavior and disciplinary actions from the other grievances. While this will reduce the volume of grievances to be processed through the current youth grievance system, the quality of resolutions to grievances will need to be addressed. In addition to separating behavior and disciplinary actions from the grievance system, management should identify the reasons institutions are unable to resolve grievances as quickly as they can address issues brought up through the communications processes that are being used and improve the grievance process to ensure the agency's accountability for protecting the youths'

right to express their complaints and respond to those complaints with quality resolutions in a timely manner.

Youth reported that they do not believe the grievance process works.

Whether a system is effective, based on the design of the process and its administration, becomes moot if the persons it is designed to serve do not believe it works. In a survey and interviews at the institutions we visited for this audit, youth were questioned on their knowledge of the grievance process and their opinion as to whether the process works.

More than 1,300 youth completed surveys and 64 were interviewed. Youth reported that they know how to file grievances; however, they are not always comfortable using the grievance system and noted concerns such as retaliation for using the system, improper or inadequate investigations to resolve grievances, and late and ineffective resolutions.

As discussed earlier, review of a sample of grievances identified that the timeliness and quality of resolutions can be improved; however, the investigation or process conducted to arrive at the resolutions was not reviewed. Additionally, while the occurrence of retaliation could not be ascertained, this was a common area of discussion in the youth interviews that were conducted and was reported as the perception by 47 percent of the youth surveyed.

Most of the youth interviewed during this audit either claimed that they had been or had seen another youth be retaliated against by staff for using the grievance system and when asked for examples of how, discussed staff writing false incident reports, ripping up grievance forms, and antagonizing youth in an effort to get them to act out. To follow up on these allegations we reviewed the grievances filed by the youth who claimed such retaliation and researched for disciplinary actions administered for several days after the grievance and were not able to conclude the occurrence of retaliation. However, when asked about their comfort in or retaliation for using the grievance system, many of the youth surveyed also indicated either having experienced or being concerned about retaliation. Specifically, youth were asked to respond to the following statements with “agree”, “sometimes agree”, or “disagree”: staff have never gotten back at me for filing a grievance; and I am not afraid to file a youth grievance.

Though 47 percent of the youth disagreed that staff never retaliate for youth filing a grievance, more than two-thirds (69%) of those that disagreed said they were not afraid to file. While the frequency of youth indicating that retaliation occurs is concerning, that this has not made most of them fearful of filing grievances gives some assurance that the systems are in place and grievances are filed when needed. Nonetheless, management should look into this and take actions to reduce youth perception that they will be retaliated against for expressing their concerns.

In addition to the survey results, youth discussed issues regarding access to the forms, confidentiality of the grievances, and timeliness of the resolutions during our interviews.

One grievance clerk interviewed admitted that he denies youth access to grievance forms if he does not consider the complaint the youth has legitimate. At another location several youth discussed that one of the grievance clerks collects the youths' copy of the grievance forms and discusses them with staff. In both instances, the Superintendents were provided the information and committed to address it. This type of behavior by youth grievance clerks not only inhibits access to the system, but also results in youth not trusting administration or having confidence that their complaints will be fairly resolved.

Concerns such as these are what have resulted in the youth preferring to use alternative processes to voice their complaints, as they are addressed quicker and are less confrontational in that they can talk to the staff they are most comfortable with. However, as discussed earlier, complaints aired in this manner are not tracked or monitored, therefore making accountability difficult.

Opportunities exist to improve the monitoring of the youth grievance system.

An effective process for monitoring any system is needed to ensure that controls are effective and provide management with information to improve the system being monitored, as well as identify trends. Additionally, if used to management's advantage, monitoring can help ensure consistency, increase knowledge of expectations, and provide feedback on common issues and performance.

There are currently two levels of routine monitoring being conducted on the youth grievance system. The first level of monitoring is by the Youth Care Investigators (YCI) located at each institution. This group conducts monthly monitoring activities to determine whether youth have access to the system, reviews the quality and timeliness of a sample of grievances, and reports the results to the C.O. Complaints Coordinator, institution Superintendents, and Directors of Juvenile Corrections. Review of the monitoring tool and its instructions identified that while the YCI do a good job at reviewing the quality and timeliness of the resolution of youth complaints, improvements are needed in the sections where they determine whether the youth have access to the system and in identifying missing grievance forms.

Minimum requirements as to the number of youth to interview and how to select them are needed. While most of the YCI interviewed enough youth to draw a conclusion as to youth access to the grievance system, some of them limited the youth interviews to the grievance clerks. The clerks can provide important information regarding the process and how well it is working. However, they are the custodians of the grievance forms on the dorm and, therefore, will have access. Other youth must also be included in these interviews to completely understand accessibility to the system.

The process to identify missing forms also needs to be strengthened. As discussed earlier, many institutions do not have a process to reconcile grievance forms issued to youth grievance clerks to those given to youth and turned in to the Local Complaint

Coordinator. Whereas the YCI's monitoring process appears to work to identify the missing forms, it should report on whether the institution has a process to identify the missing forms and how well it follows up and locates those forms. This would better emphasize the YCI's role as independently monitoring the process and more appropriately place the responsibility for accountability of the grievance system on management.

Conducting these monitoring activities and preparing the reports is time-consuming. However, the report, which was developed to provide feedback to the Superintendents and to identify strengths and weaknesses in the youth grievance system at the facility level, is often not used by management. Interviews and surveys identified that, most often, Superintendents do not respond to the reports and that many do not find the information useful to determine whether improvements are needed to the grievance system. Monitoring is an important element of systems controls and, as such, should be used to ensure the system is effective and improve operations. To accomplish this, the monitoring needs to provide information management needs for this assurance and to make decisions.

The Complaints Coordinator monitors youth grievances by reporting trend information to the Executive Council on a quarterly basis. This presentation discusses the number of grievances closed, as well as the major categories of the grievances and timeliness in which they were closed. It also identifies common types of errors seen in resolutions.

In addition to the above monitoring activities, youth rights is an area reviewed in the One-Team Program Reviews conducted by a cross-section of the agency's divisions. However, review of this tool and its associated instructions identified that this section is primarily conducted by holding focus groups with youth and does not include a review of the actual grievance process or documentation to determine the facility's effectiveness in protecting the youths' right to express grievances or complaints or the youths' comfort in using the process. Due to the resources required to conduct them, One-Team Program Reviews are planned for every three years. Even with the other monitoring activities, the importance of the grievance process and the agency's responsibility for protecting the youths' right to express their complaints makes it essential for the grievance process to be included in the One-Team Review to assure management that the system is working as intended.

Improvements are needed to the Texas Youth Complaint System to allow for accurate analysis of grievance data.

An effective integrated automated system aids in monitoring processes through the availability of reports and providing access to the grievance information for review and analysis. The TYCS is the agency's application used to collect and track grievance information. It records grievances by the tracking number on the complaint form and includes youth information, as well as information pertaining to the complaint being made, key dates of the process, the staff assigned, and the resolution.

Review of the TYCS and fiscal year 2006 data identified discrepancies and inconsistent data entry practices that make analysis, without significant manipulation, difficult. Some of these include:

Data fields are not always complete. Blanks in the database make it difficult to determine whether data is missing or if the field does not apply to a particular grievance. If the blanks are in fields that are used for calculations, the results are impacted. If the field is narrative or otherwise descriptive, blank fields limit the ability to identify trends or patterns. While reviewing for the quality of resolutions, 23 percent of grievances in our sample did not have the resolution entered into the database, and in some records some of the date fields were blank. Requiring all field to be complete and giving the option of “not applicable” when needed will increase the ability to accurately analyze the data and determine whether patterns exist.

Edit checks have not been programmed into the application. Calculation and analysis of the timeliness in resolving grievances identified instances where dates were not accurately entered. For example, there were instances where the date the grievance was assigned a DA was before the date the grievance was filed. In other records the date the grievance was resolved was before it was assigned. Errors such as these affect management’s ability to analyze the timeliness of the process; not only are a negative number of days to resolve grievances not possible, but they can skew the calculation and analysis of trends.

Tracking numbers not resolved through the grievance process are inconsistently entered into the system. There are two circumstances where grievance forms are issued to youth but an investigation is not conducted through the grievance process. The first is forms that are voided, lost, or destroyed by youth; and the other is when a grievance is determined to be an allegation of mistreatment. Review of data identified that in both situations, how the tracking number was closed varied. Some Local Complaint Coordinators document the tracking number as being resolved the same day the form is identified as missing or forwarded to the Alleged Mistreatment system, giving the appearance that the “grievance” related to that tracking number was resolved on the same day it was filed, and others enter a range of dates, some of which result in the appearance of the “grievance” being open for a significant amount of time. As a result, unless tracking numbers that fall into one of these two groups are removed from the data, analysis of timeliness in resolving grievances will not give an accurate picture.

RECOMMENDATIONS

This audit work was completed prior to events that are resulting in the complete redesign of the Youth Grievance System. As a result of these events, the recommendations initially made in the draft report, as well as management’s response to those recommendations, are obsolete. The issues discussed in this report will be addressed in the redesigned system which is planned for completion in May 2007.

