



Georgia Department of Audits and Accounts Performance Audit Division

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Why we did this review

This follow-up review was conducted to provide an update regarding issues identified in our December 2013 special examination (Report #13-21).

The purpose of the original examination was to answer questions from the Senate Appropriations Committee regarding salaries and other personnel costs of the Department of Corrections (GDC), Department of Juvenile Justice (DJJ), and State Board of Pardons and Paroles (PAP). This included information about salary schedules, turnover rates, and workers' compensation claims.

About corrections and community officers

GDC, DJJ, PAP, and the newly created Department of Community Supervision (DCS) supervise individuals charged with or convicted of crimes in state courts. Each agency employs law enforcement officers who work in secure facilities or manage a caseload in the community.

The turnover rate for corrections officers is much higher than the turnover rate for community officers. In fiscal year 2015, corrections officer turnover was 32% compared to 16% for community officers. Starting salaries for corrections officers are generally lower than the starting salaries for community officers and other law enforcement positions in state government.

Follow-Up Review – Corrections & Community Officers

Agencies taking steps to improve officer salaries and turnover

What we found

The Georgia General Assembly, Georgia Department of Corrections (GDC), Department of Juvenile Justice (DJJ), and State Board of Pardons and Paroles (PAP) have taken steps to address the salary and turnover issues identified in our 2013 report. The agencies received funding to increase salaries and improved the information collected on the causes of turnover; however, turnover remains high among corrections officers. There are additional actions currently underway, but not fully implemented, that could also have an impact.

This report provides information on the changes these agencies have made since the original report. It also updates information on salaries, turnover, and workers' compensation claims.

Corrections Officer Salaries

At the time of the original report, entry level corrections officers at DJJ and GDC received starting salaries lower than law enforcement officers in other state agencies. The most common entry level salary for DJJ and GDC corrections officers was \$24,322. These officers were eligible for a 5% salary increase to \$25,538 after one year in the position with any subsequent pay increase limited to a competitive promotion to the sergeant position. In addition, DJJ corrections officers received a lower median base salary than GDC corrections officers in comparable positions. The median salary for a DJJ Juvenile Corrections Officer 1 (JCO1) was \$25,538, approximately \$800 less than the median salary for a GDC Corrections Officer 1 (CO1). The pay gap between DJJ and GDC supervisors was even more pronounced, with DJJ sergeants making approximately 9% (\$3,000) less than GDC sergeants, DJJ lieutenants making 12%

(\$4,500) less than GDC lieutenants, and DJJ captains making 13% (\$5,000) less than GDC captains.

To address these issues, DJJ revised its JCO pay structure in fiscal year 2014 to award a 5% salary increase to JCOs after six months of service and successful completion of the Basic Juvenile Correctional Officer Training, as well as an additional salary increase (to \$27,472) and promotion to JCO2 after 12 months of satisfactory performance. In fiscal year 2016, DJJ implemented a 10% salary increase for JCO2s upon receiving supervisory duties. DJJ also provided additional payments such as cash overtime at select facilities, a military experience salary incentive, and salary supplements for officers working in maximum security positions.

In fiscal year 2015, GDC revised its pay structure to increase the starting salary of CO2s by approximately \$2,000, from \$25,538 to \$27,472. Additionally, all officers with two or more years of experience with GDC received a tenure increase of up to 4% of their salary. In fiscal year 2016, GDC received funding to create a new job classification for CO positions at special mission facilities; these officers' starting salaries will be higher than CO positions at medium security facilities. The new pay structure eliminated pay supplements for special mission facility positions, but ensured a minimum 4% increase to eligible officers.

The fiscal year 2017 budget provides \$29 million for an additional salary increase for security officers to address recruitment and retention issues. DJJ received \$5.5 million and GDC received \$23.6 million; both plan to use these funds to increase the salaries of corrections officers at all levels (see Exhibit 1). While the proposed salary increases will help address a major cause of turnover, the new starting salaries for DJJ and GDC corrections officers will remain lower than the starting salaries for other law enforcement positions in state government and for corrections officers in other states.

Exhibit 1 **DJJ and GDC Corrections Officer Starting Salaries**

| Position | DJJ | | | GDC | | |
|--|----------|----------|----------|----------|----------|----------|
| | Current | Proposed | % Change | Current | Proposed | % Change |
| Correctional Officer 1 | \$24,322 | \$27,936 | 15% | \$24,322 | \$27,936 | 15% |
| Correctional Officer 2 | \$27,472 | \$31,040 | 13% | \$27,472 | \$31,040 | 13% |
| Correctional Officer 3¹ | \$27,472 | \$34,144 | 24% | - | - | - |
| Sergeant | \$28,846 | \$35,479 | 23% | \$29,690 | \$35,479 | 20% |
| Lieutenant | \$29,400 | \$37,558 | 28% | \$32,659 | \$37,558 | 15% |
| Captain | \$32,418 | \$40,570 | 25% | \$32,659 | \$40,570 | 24% |
| ¹ Officers in this position have a minimum of two years experience. DJJ plans to use this position for additional career advancement opportunities without assuming supervisory responsibilities. | | | | | | |
| Source: Agency data | | | | | | |

The pay structures proposed by DJJ and GDC would result in corrections officers in all positions receiving the same starting salaries. The salary increases range from 15% and 13% for the CO1 and CO2 positions, respectively, to as high as 28% and 25% for DJJ lieutenants and DJJ captains, respectively. The proposed \$3,600 salary increase for DJJ and GDC entry level corrections officers (JCOs and COs) would move Georgia from 10th to 6th highest among other southern states in corrections officer entry level salary; however, the new starting salary for entry level corrections officers would remain the lowest sworn officer salary in Georgia.

Community Officer Salaries¹

At the time of the original report, the median salaries for DJJ community officers were at or slightly above the minimum salary for their respective pay grades, and the median salaries for most GDC and PAP

¹ 'Community officers' include DJJ Juvenile Probation/Parole Specialists and DCS Community Supervision Officers, which includes former GDC Probation Officers and PAP Parole Officers.

community officers fell closer to the middle of the pay grade. The most common entry salary for PAP parole officers was \$32,104, approximately 2% more than the \$31,474 received by newly hired GDC probation officers. The starting salaries for GDC and PAP community officers were generally comparable to, or higher than, the starting salaries for community officers in other states and many local governments, while the starting salaries for DJJ community officers were generally lower.

During the 2015 session, the General Assembly passed House Bill 310, which transferred the oversight of all probationers and parolees from GDC and PAP, and certain probationers from DJJ, to the newly created Department of Community Supervision (DCS). Effective fiscal year 2017, all community officers from GDC and PAP will be employed by DCS. To address the pay disparity issues identified in the original report, DCS created a Community Supervision Officer (CSO) job series and set the starting salary for CSOs at \$32,104.² The CSO job series increases the starting salaries for former GDC community officers and ensures that officers in comparable positions are in the same job titles and pay grades.

DJJ indicated that effective April 2016 the starting salary for the Probation Officer 1 position (formerly Juvenile Probation/Parole Specialist 1) increased to \$32,104. As a result, all entry level DCS and DJJ community officers will receive the same starting salary. DJJ also indicated that the starting salary for the Probation Officer 2 position increased to \$35,313, the same starting salary as the CSO2 position at DCS.

Turnover

In fiscal year 2013, corrections officer turnover was significantly higher than the state government average of 17.9%. Specifically, the turnover rate for DJJ JCOs was more than three times the state government average and nearly twice as high as the turnover rate for GDC COs. Community officer turnover rates were comparable to, or less than, the state government average.

As of fiscal year 2015, corrections officer turnover remains significantly higher than the state government average and community officer turnover remains comparable to, or less than, the state government average (see [Appendix A](#)). DJJ, GDC, and PAP have taken the following actions to reduce turnover; however, some of these actions were recently implemented and adequate time has not passed to assess their impact. DCS, DJJ, and PAP have also improved the information collected on the causes of turnover.

- DJJ implemented an application screening assessment to select better matched candidates, extended initial training to enhance the skill set of officers, developed a leadership training program, and added more award opportunities to its employee recognition program. DJJ plans to use the Juvenile Corrections Officer 3 position to increase opportunities for career advancement without assuming supervisory duties. DJJ implemented the limited use of cash overtime payments to officers who work in select facilities in addition to awarding compensatory time. Additionally, it allowed officers from other facilities to work overtime shifts once they meet their hour requirement at their home facility.

In March 2015, DJJ implemented a revised exit interview questionnaire and conducted an employee satisfaction survey in late 2014. The satisfaction survey had a 34% participation rate, with 67% of participants coming from non-supervisory positions. DJJ plans to conduct needs assessments based on the data it collects from these instruments. DJJ also tracks the effectiveness of its application screening assessment, which it attributes to an initial reduction in turnover that has since slowed.

- According to GDC staff, to reduce officers' stress and improve their work environment, it received funding to harden facilities by replacing common items (beds, lockers, sinks, etc.) that inmates

² This salary represents an increase for DJJ and GDC community officers to the starting salary for PAP community officers at the time of the original report.

were fashioning into weapons; technology and equipment upgrades to prevent contraband and personal protective gear were also provided. GDC also plans to increase opportunities for career advancement by bringing corrections officer salaries in line with other salaries in the department to allow promotion without supervisory responsibilities.

GDC has identified its exit interview process as an area requiring additional emphasis and reports it is in the initial planning stages of revamping the process to make it more effective. The current exit interview questionnaire has been in use since 2009.

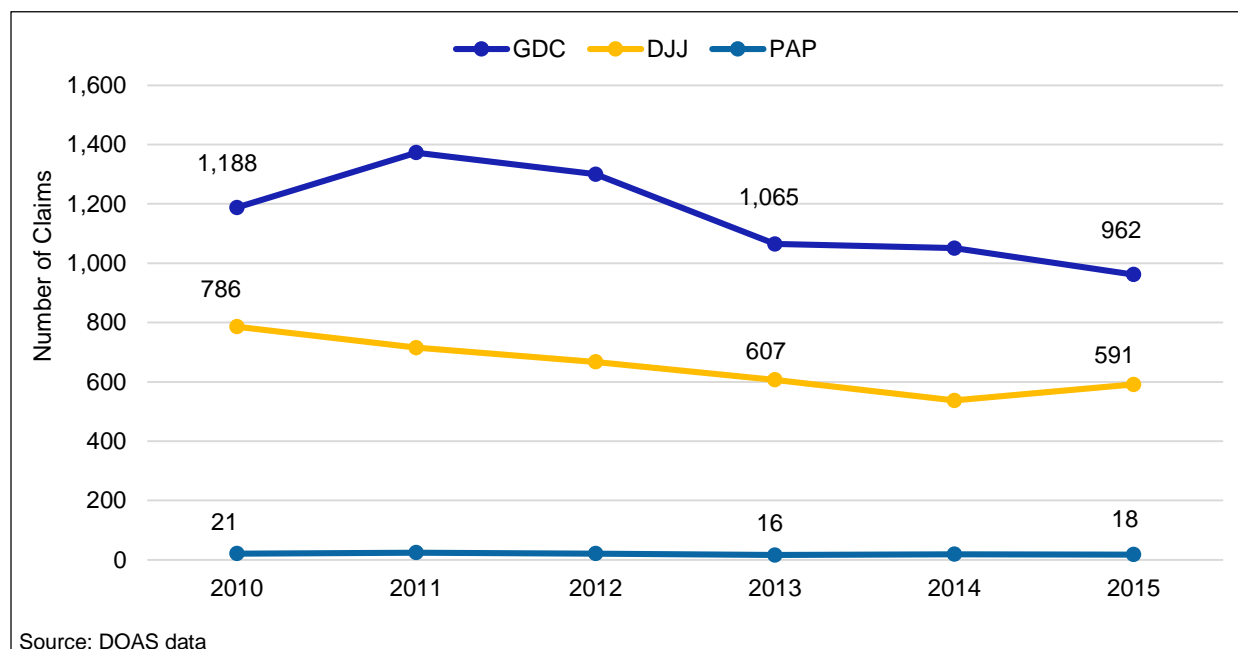
- While our original report did not identify turnover issues for PAP, it implemented a new applicant tracking system to attract more qualified candidates, enhanced training opportunities, established employee recognition programs, and offered career advancement opportunities through its Upward Mobility Path prior to the transfer of community officers to DCS. A new exit interview questionnaire was implemented in early 2014 to collect more information such as work location, job title, and employment information after separation.
- DCS will begin exit interviews in 2016 and plans to conduct a satisfaction survey during fiscal year 2017. DCS indicated that senior management intends to analyze the data collected from exit interviews and satisfaction surveys on a quarterly basis.

Workers' Compensation

The original report showed that, from fiscal year 2010 to 2013, the number of workers' compensation claims filed by DJJ, GDC, and PAP employees decreased each year. Approximately 75% of DJJ and GDC's claims were reported by their corrections officers, nearly all of which were COs or JCOs. DJJ and GDC corrections officers were the most claim-prone and expensive positions in terms of workers' compensation claims. As shown in Exhibit 2, the number of claims filed by DJJ, GDC, and PAP employees has continued to decline each fiscal year with few exceptions. The total cost of workers' compensation claims has also decreased from approximately \$26.5 million in fiscal year 2012 to \$12.4 million in fiscal year 2015. DJJ and GDC corrections officers remain the most injury-prone and expensive positions, representing over 70% of the claims filed by employees of those agencies in fiscal year 2015.

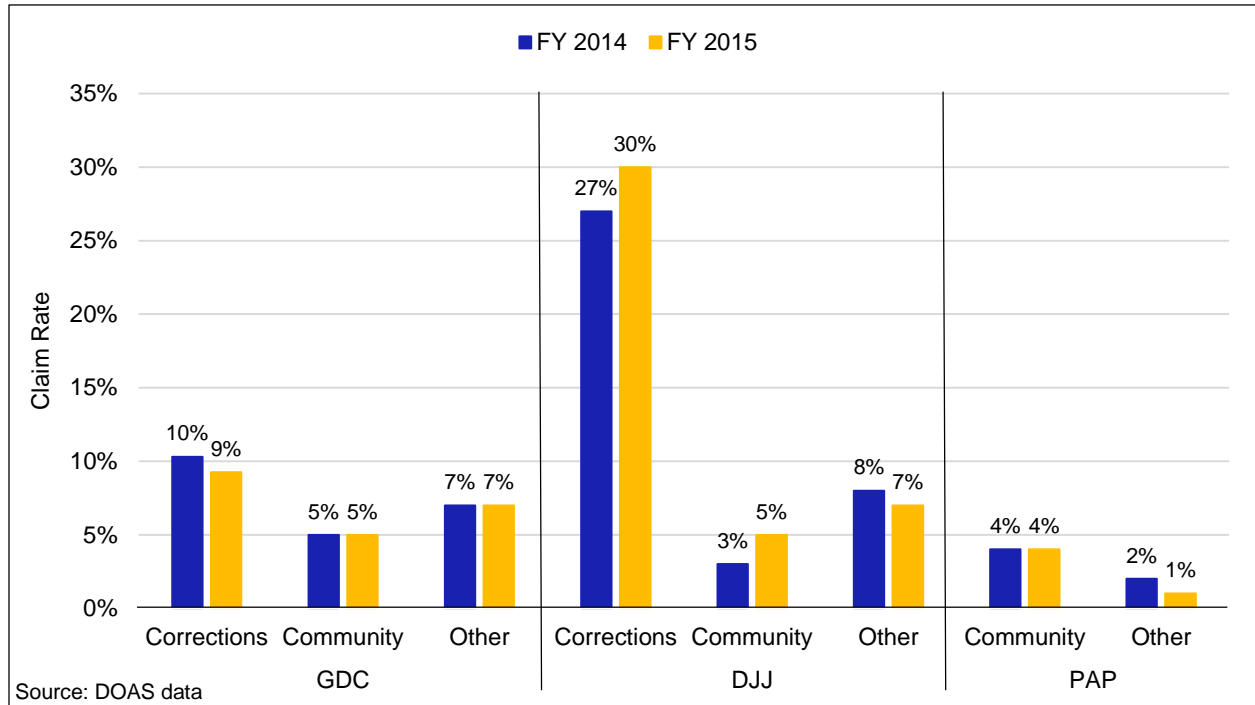
Exhibit 2

Number of Workers' Compensation Claims, Fiscal Years 2010 - 2015



As shown in **Exhibit 3**, the claim rate—the ratio of claims to full-time employees—of DJJ corrections officers continues to be higher than GDC corrections officers. In fiscal year 2015, DJJ corrections officers' claim rate of 30% was more than three times higher than GDC corrections officers' claim rate. Claim rates for community officers at these agencies remain lower than the claim rates for corrections officers.

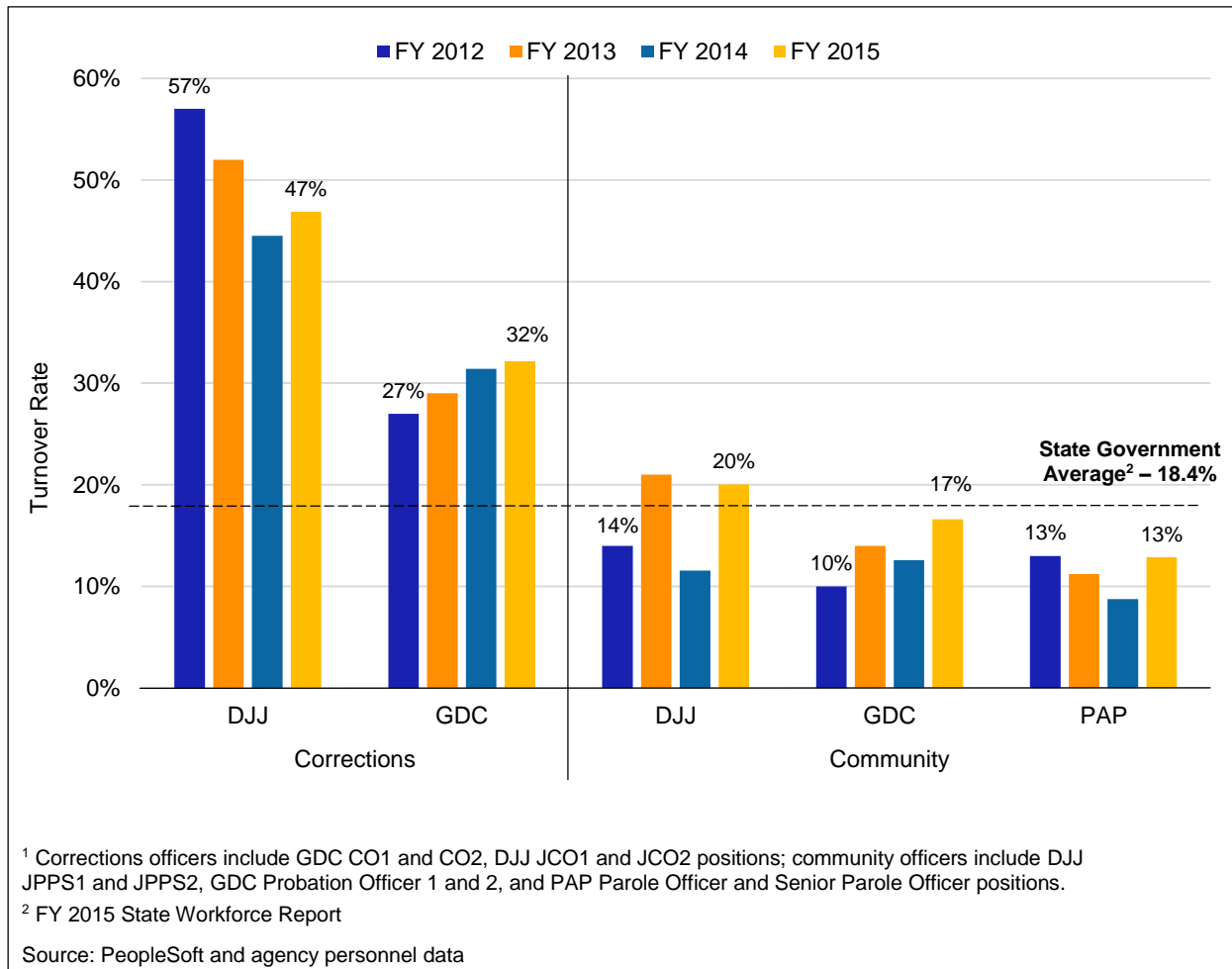
Exhibit 3
Workers' Compensation Claim Rate, Fiscal Years 2014 - 2015



Agency Responses: DJJ, GDC, PAP, and DCS expressed agreement with the findings and statistics presented in this follow-up report.

A copy of the 2013 special examination (#13-21) may be accessed at <http://www.audits.ga.gov/rsaAudits>.

Appendix A: Corrections & Community Officer¹ Turnover Rates Fiscal Years 2012 – 2015



The Performance Audit Division was established in 1971 to conduct in-depth reviews of state-funded programs. Our reviews determine if programs are meeting goals and objectives; measure program results and effectiveness; identify alternate methods to meet goals; evaluate efficiency of resource allocation; assess compliance with laws and regulations; and provide credible management information to decision-makers. For more information, contact us at (404)656-2180 or visit our website at www.audits.ga.gov.