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## Report Highlights

# Response to the COVID-19 Pandemic in Correctional Facilities

*Department of Public Safety and Corrections*

Audit Control # 40200023

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## Why We Conducted This Audit

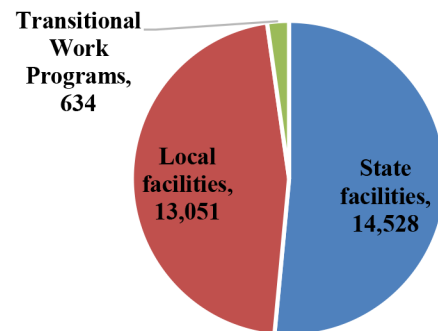
The purpose of this report is to provide information on the Department of Public Safety and Corrections' (DOC) response to the COVID-19 pandemic. According to the Prison Policy Initiative and the Louisiana COVID-19 Health Equity Task Force, prisons and jails are at especially high risk for outbreaks of COVID-19 because they are densely populated facilities where social distancing is difficult, sanitation is poor, and medical resources are limited.

## What We Found

Overall, DOC faced multiple issues and challenges in addressing the COVID-19 pandemic. These issues and challenges include the following:

- **DOC protocols complied with CDC guidance in the areas of testing, medical isolation, screening, visitation, personal protective equipment, social distancing, and transfers. However, it did not have processes to verify that correctional facilities implemented these protocols.** Although DOC was in regular contact with facilities, it could have implemented a process to verify that facilities were following COVID-19 protocols that did not require on-site visits. According to stakeholders, protocols may not have been uniformly implemented at all prison facilities.
- **DOC administered 21,110 COVID-19 tests to prisoners in state correctional facilities between March 2020 and January 2021. Of the 8,211 prisoners tested during that timeframe, 3,253 (39.6%) had a positive result.** However, DOC did not collect COVID-19 information, such as test results and infection rates, on state prisoners housed in local correctional facilities, even though approximately half of state prisoners are housed in these facilities.

**DOC Incarcerated Population  
June 2020**



**Source:** Prepared by legislative auditor's staff using information from DOC's briefing book.

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Department of Public Safety and Corrections

## What We Found (Cont.)

Prisoner and Staff COVID-19 Test Statistics in State Correctional Facilities* March 2020 through January 2021				
State Facility	Positive – Prisoners	Total Prisoners Tested	Percent Positive	Positive – Staff**
Allen Correctional Center (ALC)	265	840	31.5%	34
Dixon Correctional Institute (DCI)	894	1439	62.1%	85
David Wade Correctional Center (DWCC)	86	205	42.0%	84
Elayn Hunt Correctional Center (EHCC)	228	661	34.5%	103
LA Correctional Institute for Women (LCIW)	386	530	72.8%	88
LA State Penitentiary (LSP)	945	1,942	48.7%	236
Rayburn Correctional Center (RCC)	130	1,307	9.9%	98
Raymond Laborde Correctional Center (RLCC)	319	1,393	22.9%	80
<b>Grand Total*</b>	<b>3,253</b>	<b>8,211</b>	<b>39.6%</b>	<b>808</b>

\*DOC administered a total of 21,110 tests to 8,211 prisoners. Some prisoners were tested multiple times and some were housed at more than one facility. In addition, a prisoner could have multiple positive tests as COVID-19 tests may have been required to receive routine medical treatment at a hospital or due to surveillance testing. LSP and LCIW may include local prisoners that were housed at these facilities during the pandemic.  
\*\*As of January 19, 2021  
**Source:** Prepared by legislative auditor’s staff using unaudited information provided by DOC.

- **DOC faced challenges in providing programming for prisoners during COVID-19 and in not allowing visitors into the facilities.** DOC experienced problems with the implementation of video visitation services, and it reported a sharp decrease in the number of education completions between April and June 2020 because programs were suspended to reduce the spread of COVID-19.
- **Out of 1,100 potential candidates, DOC furloughed 68 out of 100 prisoners approved by the Furlough Release Panel.** The panel reviewed a total of 594 prisoners and was suspended in June 2020 after Louisiana entered Phase 2 of recovery. Nationwide prison populations declined after the start of the pandemic, primarily due to diversion efforts that reduced prison admissions, not releases from prisons.
- **DOC’s existing staffing challenges were exacerbated because of the increase in staff absences during the pandemic.** From March through December 2020, DOC correctional facility staff used a total of 1.5 million hours of leave, a 21.7% increase from 1.3 million the prior year. In addition, staff worked 1.2 million hours of overtime.