

## EXECUTIVE DIGEST

# EARLY INTERVENTION SERVICES FOR DELINQUENT YOUTHS

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### INTRODUCTION

This report, issued in October 2001, contains the results of our performance audit\* of Early Intervention Services\* for Delinquent Youths, Judiciary and Family Independence Agency (FIA).

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### AUDIT PURPOSE

This performance audit was conducted as part of the constitutional responsibility of the Office of the Auditor General. Performance audits are conducted on a priority basis related to the potential for improving effectiveness\* and efficiency\*.

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### BACKGROUND

In the State of Michigan, delinquent youths adjudicated for an offense may remain under circuit court jurisdiction (Judiciary), may be committed\* or referred\* to FIA, or, beginning in January 1999, may be committed to county juvenile agencies. In any case, delinquent youths who are placed in community-based settings\* may receive early intervention services in an attempt to rehabilitate\* the youths.

"Early intervention services," as used in this report, refers to community-based services and programs provided to delinquent youths who were initially placed in community-based settings.

### Judiciary

The mission\* of the State Court Administrative Office (SCAO) is to provide leadership and promote effective, efficient, equitable, uniform, and accessible court and justice system services to advance the highest quality of justice in Michigan. Inherent in the mission of the SCAO is the responsibility of providing administrative oversight and management or technical assistance to judges and trial court staff on matters relating to the management of judicial functions. The SCAO also analyzes court rules and legislation affecting the administration of the court and proposes changes to rules and statutes where appropriate.

Section 712A.18(1) of the *Michigan Compiled Laws* states that, if a juvenile is adjudicated for an offense, the court ". . . may enter any of the following orders of disposition that are appropriate for the welfare of the juvenile and society in view of the facts proven and ascertained . . . ." The Section contains a list of possible orders of disposition, including placing the youth on probation or under supervision in the youth's home or the home of a relative, placing the youth in a residential treatment facility, committing or referring the youth to FIA, and committing the youth to a county juvenile agency.

As of September 30, 2000, there were 57 circuit courts throughout the State. During fiscal year 1999-2000, approximately 40,800 delinquent youths were under circuit court jurisdiction for part or all of the fiscal year. Approximately 1,100 of these youths were either immediately or subsequently committed or referred to FIA. Delinquent youths remaining under court jurisdiction are generally placed in community-based settings and may have received early intervention services.

## FIA

FIA administers juvenile justice services, including early intervention services, for youths committed to FIA for services or referred to FIA for care and supervision. The Child and Family Services Administration oversees policy development for services provided to youths and families through FIA county offices. Juvenile justice specialists are located within the Field Operations Administration.

The purpose of providing juvenile justice services is to carry out Section 712A.1(3) of the *Michigan Compiled Laws*, which mandates that each youth under court jurisdiction be provided:

. . . care, guidance, and control, preferably in his or her own home, conducive to the juvenile's welfare and the best interest of the state. If a juvenile is removed from the control of his or her parents, the juvenile shall be placed in care as nearly as possible equivalent to the care that should have been given to the juvenile by his or her parents.

FIA directs adjudicated delinquent youths\* through the continuum of treatment services determined to provide safe and proper care that is appropriate to the youths' individual needs while taking into account community safety. The treatment services are meant to provide youths and families with the knowledge and skills needed to reduce delinquent behavior, promote appropriate attitudes, and strengthen the youths' capacity for self-sufficiency to enable them to function responsibly in their home communities and become contributing members of society.

As of September 30, 2000, FIA was responsible for 4,233 delinquent youths, of which approximately 1,270 (30%)

were initially placed in community-based settings. Juvenile justice services were administered by 40 central office staff and 171 staff at FIA county offices.

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**AUDIT OBJECTIVES  
AND CONCLUSIONS**

**Audit Objective:** To assess the effectiveness of the circuit courts' and FIA's intake and placement processes.

**Conclusion: We concluded that the circuit courts' and FIA's intake and placement processes were moderately effective.** Pertaining to the circuit courts, our assessment disclosed reportable conditions\* related to social studies, goals and action steps, out-of-State residential placements\*, and staffing and caseload issues (Findings 1 through 4). Pertaining to FIA, our assessment disclosed reportable conditions related to initial risk assessments\* and needs assessments\*, substance abuse\* assessments, and the security level of initial placements (Findings 9 through 11).

**Audit Objective:** To assess the circuit courts' and FIA's efforts to determine the availability of early intervention services for delinquent youths under court jurisdiction or committed or referred to FIA.

**Conclusion: We concluded that the circuit courts and FIA made limited efforts to formally determine and/or document the availability of early intervention services for delinquent youths under court jurisdiction or committed or referred to FIA.** Our assessment disclosed a reportable condition for the circuit courts and for FIA related to the availability of early intervention services (Findings 5 and 12).

**Audit Objective:** To determine whether delinquent youths under court jurisdiction or committed or referred to FIA received early intervention services for identified needs.

**Conclusion:** We concluded that delinquent youths under court jurisdiction sometimes may not receive and youths committed or referred to FIA often did not receive early intervention services for their identified needs. Pertaining to the circuit courts, our assessment disclosed reportable conditions related to court-ordered services and programs and the identification of youths' needs, services, and programs (Findings 6 and 7). Pertaining to FIA, our assessment disclosed reportable conditions related to quarterly risk and needs reassessments, initial and updated service plans\*, service referral grids, and the provision of early intervention services (Findings 13 through 16).

**Audit Objective:** To assess the circuit courts' and FIA's efforts to evaluate the effectiveness of early intervention services provided to delinquent youths.

**Conclusion:** We concluded that the circuit courts and FIA made limited efforts to evaluate the effectiveness of early intervention services provided to delinquent youths. Our assessment disclosed a reportable condition for the circuit courts and for FIA related to the assessment of early intervention services (Findings 8 and 17).

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**AUDIT SCOPE AND  
METHODOLOGY**

Our audit scope was to examine the program and other records related to early intervention services for delinquent youths. The audit scope included the examination of case file and other records at six circuit courts and six Family Independence Agency county offices: Muskegon, Oakland, Ottawa, St. Clair, Wayne, and Wexford. Our

audit was conducted in accordance with *Government Auditing Standards* issued by the Comptroller General of the United States and, accordingly, included such tests of the records and such other auditing procedures as we considered necessary in the circumstances.

Our audit procedures included examination of records and activities pertaining to early intervention services for delinquent youths primarily for the period April 1, 1998 through April 30, 2000.

To accomplish our objectives, we reviewed pertinent legislation; court rules; administrative orders; court, the SCAO, and FIA policy; and authoritative literature. Also, we interviewed staff at the SCAO and FIA's central office. We visited six circuit courts and interviewed probation officers\* and supervisory staff. We also visited six FIA county offices and interviewed FIA juvenile justice specialists and supervisory staff.

In connection with our first objective pertaining to the circuit courts, we assessed the appropriateness of social studies conducted to make intake recommendations, analyzed the identification of goals\* and action steps, reviewed out-of-State residential placements, and assessed staffing and caseload issues.

In connection with our first objective pertaining to FIA, we evaluated the use of FIA's structured decision-making tools and reports related to the intake and placement of selected youths. Also, we analyzed the security levels of initial placements.

In connection with our second objective pertaining to both the circuit courts and FIA, we evaluated efforts to assess

the availability of the predominant types of needed early intervention services. Also, we reviewed the availability of early intervention services and the sources of funding for early intervention services.

In connection with our third objective pertaining to the circuit courts, we examined case files to determine that youths were provided with court-ordered services and that youths' needs, services, and programs were identified.

In connection with our third objective pertaining to FIA, we reviewed case files to determine that youths received needed services.

In connection with our fourth objective pertaining to both the circuit courts and FIA, we reviewed program evaluations and discussed efforts to evaluate the effectiveness of early intervention services with staff in the counties we visited.

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**AGENCY RESPONSES**

Our audit report includes 17 findings and 20 corresponding recommendations. The SCAO's preliminary response indicated that it agreed with all but 1 of its 8 findings and with all but 1 of the 10 corresponding recommendations. FIA's preliminary response indicated that it agreed with all 9 of its findings and with the 10 corresponding recommendations.