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Report alleges multiple problems at Hinds juvenile facility

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Unreported suicide attempts, poor staff relations and failure to provide timely mental health evaluations continue at Hinds County's Henley-Young Juvenile Detention Center, according to a state inspection report.

The state Juvenile Facilities Monitoring Unit inspected the detention center on June 23 and gave its report to the county July 22.

Juvenile Facilities Monitoring Unit Director Donald Beard and Henley-Young's detention director Darren Farr did not return calls.

The report, obtained by The Clarion-Ledger, makes 14 recommendations. It's unclear what could happen to the center if it doesn't follow them, but county officials say they plan to.

"A crucial step in recognizing problems associated with a juvenile's behavior is a mental health evaluation," the report states.

The inspection came after Hinds supervisors learned that seven juveniles have attempted suicide at the center since January.

In one case, a girl was found with several socks tied around her neck. In another, a boy repeatedly hit his head on the door of his cell.

Detention center staff never reported the cases to the county or state, which must be done immediately, according to the most recent report.

In addition, juveniles must have mental health screenings within an hour of admission to a juvenile detention center. However, Hinds County was doing them much later, after a detention hearing took place, according to the report. The state recommends the county establish an oversight committee to monitor the 84-bed detention center, which houses juveniles aged 10 to 17.

Hinds County plans to follow the state recommendations listed in the report, said Supervisors President George Smith.

"It's all about the kids to make sure they are safe and taken care of," he said.

The Mississippi Youth Justice Project, a project of the Southern Poverty Law Center that advocates for juvenile detention reform, has ongoing concerns about Henley-Young, said agency director Bear Atwood.

"Too many of the children that are there should not be there under any circumstances," Atwood said referring to mentally ill juveniles.

A state evaluation done earlier this year found several violations of state and federal laws.

Violations included runaways being locked up with criminal offenders, juveniles eating in their cells where they sleep and use the toilet and adults jailed where juveniles are held.

In January, Hinds supervisors voted to take back control of the detention center about a year after handing it over to Hinds County Youth Judge William Skinner.

That led to division between Skinner and Farr. The two do not communicate, according to the report.

"Adversarial and negative practices within either the operation or administrative staff transcends to poor services for the juveniles being detained," the report states.

Skinner is seeking an injunction to stop supervisors from regaining control of the center. The state Supreme Court assigned retired Chancery Judge Bill Lutz of Ridgeland to hear the case after Hinds County's four Chancery Court judges recused themselves because they work with Skinner.

Skinner did not return phone calls seeking comment.

To comment on this story, call Heather Civil at (601) 961-7067.
