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Feds end 11-year oversight of Ga. juvenile facilities

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Georgia's juvenile justice system has been released from federal oversight, 11 years after the U.S. Justice Department investigated reports of overcrowding and abuse at the state's youth detention facilities, the governor said Monday.

Gov. Sonny Perdue said that the state has made major improvements since it was placed under federal monitoring more than a decade ago.

"Our goal in this agency is to ensure that every child coming through these facilities is treated as if they were our own son or daughter," Perdue said. He was joined at a state Capitol news conference Monday by state Department of Juvenile Justice Commissioner Albert Murray.

The state entered into an agreement with the Justice Department in 1998 after a scathing federal report found Georgia's juvenile facilities suffered from overcrowding, lack of training for staff members, abuse of inmates, poor medical care and mental health treatment as well as inadequate educational facilities. Under the legally binding agreement, the state pledged to make improvements.

The state facilities are no longer crowded and staff members are receiving better training, officials said.

The agency's school system is accredited by the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools, and the Department of Juvenile Justice has new offices designed to improve youths' access to medical and mental health care.

The final report from federal monitor David Roush praised the state's efforts to overhaul health care and mental health for incarcerated youth. It labeled mental health care services "exemplary" and medical

care services “excellent.” Both serve as national models for other states, the report found.

Independent monitors conducted random final inspections at six of the state’s juvenile justice facilities last year.

“It has been my belief that DJJ has operated safe and constitutionally sound facilities and programs for many years, and we can finally put an end to any question about that,” Murray said Monday.

The state currently houses 3,547 children at 29 regional youth detention centers and youth development campuses. DJJ also supervises about another 20,000 children outside the facilities.

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