



Results in Brief

May 14, 2026

Special Review: The California Department of Corrections and Rehabilitation's Implementation and Compliance With Reforms Governing Restricted Housing Units (Audit Report N° 25–01, May 2026)

Introduction

In this special review, we reviewed both historical California regulations on segregated housing confinement and regulations that became effective on November 1, 2023, that implemented the Department of Corrections and Rehabilitation's (the department) restricted housing units. We assessed the department's compliance with regulations and policies governing the placement and retention of incarcerated people in restricted housing, the living conditions within those units, and the effects of these regulations and policies on violence against staff and the incarcerated population.

As of June 2025, 29 of California's 31 prisons have restricted housing units with a total capacity of just over 7,000 beds. We focused on the restricted housing units at four prisons: California State Prison, Sacramento (CSP-Sacramento); California State Prison, Corcoran (Corcoran); Mule Creek State Prison; and Central California Women's Facility.

Results

Despite Significant Revisions to the Restricted Housing Term Matrix, the Number of Rules Violations, Incidents Requiring the Use of Force, and Incidents of Violence Have Not Decreased

Our review of departmental data including incident reports, rules violations, and use-of-force incidents supports our finding that violence in prisons has increased. However, because the current restricted housing regulations had been implemented for only two years at the time of our review, it is difficult to determine whether the increase in prison violence we found will continue.

Assaults Against Staff Increased Following Implementation of the New Regulations

From November 1, 2022, through June 30, 2025, we found that the number of times staff used force increased significantly. Each year of our review period saw an overall increase in use-of-force incidents within restricted housing units starting with a low of 86 in November 2022, which more than doubled to 174 by June 2025.

We also analyzed reports of incidents that occurred from November 1, 2021, through October 31, 2025, categorized as involving force and violence at the four prisons we reviewed and found that the total number increased both inside and outside restricted housing units after the current regulations took effect.

The Number of Rules Violations Committed by Incarcerated People Did Not Decrease Following Implementation of Restricted Housing Regulations

To determine the effect the regulatory reform had on the number and types of rules violations committed, we compared four years of statewide data—two years predating restricted housing and two years after restricted housing was implemented. We found that the number of rules violations committed increased each year even though the offenses that qualified for restricted housing decreased by 14 (from 32 offenses to 18) and the incarcerated population declined.

Total rules violations increased each year from November 1, 2021, through October 31, 2025, for both the 14 offenses removed from the restricted housing term matrix (term matrix) and the 18 offenses that were retained. The total number of violations for offenses removed from the term matrix increased over the four years, from 8,939 to 14,563, which constituted



an increase of 5,624 violations, or 63 percent. Likewise, the violations related to offenses that continued to result in a restricted housing term also increased from 6,885 to 12,130 rules violations, or 76 percent.

The Elimination of Some Violent Offenses From the Restricted Housing Term Matrix Has Likely Contributed to the Increase in Violence in Prisons

Violence against incarcerated people made up 76 percent (11,026 out of 14,563) of the rules violations that were eliminated from the term matrix for the 12-month period ending October 31, 2025. These rules violations were for relatively minor acts against other incarcerated people, not against staff. In addition, although the total number of rules violations for relatively minor violent offenses and nonviolent offenses, excluding the category of violence against persons, decreased the first year after implementation of the current regulations, from 3,427 to 3,020, that number rose to 3,537 the year after. Therefore, the increase in relatively minor violent offenses and nonviolent offenses that had been removed from the matrix may be in part attributed to the regulatory reform.

Violations for violent offenses including violent acts against staff and serious acts of physical and sexual violence against incarcerated people made up 57 percent (6,929 out of 12,130) of rules violations that remain on the term matrix for the 12-month period ending October 31, 2025. Within this category of violence against persons, at least 4,180 out of 6,929 (60 percent) were against nonincarcerated people such as staff, visitors, contractors, or stakeholders.

The Department Did Not Ensure Staff Offered the Minimum Required Out-of-Cell Time to the Restricted Housing Population

We analyzed records of 12 restricted housing units for the week of June 23, 2025, through June 29, 2025, in the four prisons included in our review for compliance with the regulatory weekly requirement of 20 out-of-cell hours. We found that Mule Creek State Prison, Central California Women's Facility, and five out of six units at Corcoran generally offered their restricted populations exercise time of at least 10 hours per

week, and 20 hours total of out-of-cell time per week. However, Corcoran's Enhanced Outpatient Program (EOP) restricted housing unit and all four of CSP-Sacramento's EOP and Correctional Clinical Case Management System (CCCMS) restricted housing units lacked adequate documentation of compliance with out-of-cell time, particularly the 20-hour weekly requirement.

The highest noncompliance rate for yard time was 59 percent at Corcoran's EOP restricted housing unit and approximately 61 percent at one of CSP-Sacramento's EOP restricted housing units. The highest noncompliance rate for total out-of-cell time was 67.5 percent at Corcoran's same EOP unit and 91 percent at CSP-Sacramento's CCCMS unit.

We reviewed four additional weeks at the five restricted housing units that had high noncompliance rates for out-of-cell time. We found that noncompliance in these five units at Corcoran and CSP-Sacramento were not anomalies. The two prisons did not consistently offer or at least did not document out-of-cell time required by regulations and policy. Managing restricted housing units at Corcoran and CSP-Sacramento is particularly challenging because of the higher number of units these prisons operate, and the mental health level of care required in these restricted housing units.

Incarcerated People at the EOP and CCCMS Levels of Care Are Not Always Offered the Required Weekly Hours for Structured Therapeutic Activity

Incarcerated people in restricted housing at the CCCMS level of care must generally be offered at least 1.5 therapeutic-activity hours per week; those at the EOP level of care must be offered at least 10 hours per week that may be counted towards the minimum out-of-cell requirement.

We reviewed selected mental health records of 100 incarcerated people placed in 10 EOP and CCCMS restricted housing units of the four prisons for the week of June 23, 2025, through June 29, 2025, and the week of December 1, 2025, through December 7, 2025. We found that 31 of the 100 incarcerated people whose records we reviewed were not offered the



minimum weekly therapeutic treatment hours for their designated EOP or CCCMS level of care.

Much like the noncompliance with yard time and total weekly out-of-cell hours, we found that Corcoran's EOP unit and all four of CSP-Sacramento's EOP and CCCMS restricted housing units did not always offer the required therapeutic treatment hours to its restricted population. While Mule Creek State Prison and Central California Women's Facility had some deficiencies in the two weeks we reviewed, Corcoran's three CCCMS restricted housing units complied with all required mental health group therapy hours we reviewed.

Restricted Housing Records are Incomplete and Inaccurate

We found that the four prisons we reviewed maintained incomplete and inconsistent records on restricted housing unit activities, including out-of-cell time. We compared group therapy treatment hours recorded by custody staff in the Automated Restricted Housing Records (ARHR) system to mental health records and found inconsistencies in 69 of 100 group therapeutic treatment records we reviewed. Specifically, custody staff did not document in the ARHR all EOP and CCCMS group therapy sessions that mental health staff offered. These oversights may have contributed to the high rates of noncompliance with the requirements for out-of-cell time.

In Some Cases, Administrative Reviews and Classification Committee Hearings for Incarcerated People Placed in Restricted Housing Were Not Conducted Timely or Documented Consistently

We examined 65 cases from November 1, 2023, through June 30, 2025, to determine whether incarcerated people were properly placed and retained in restricted housing. We found that three of the 65 cases lacked documented evidence that the required administrative review had been completed. Furthermore, a fourth case did not include information about the official who conducted the review, making it difficult to confirm whether the review had been completed by a staff member of the rank required by regulations.

In addition, in six of the 65 placements we reviewed, or 9 percent, the administrative review was not completed on the first business day after the incarcerated person was placed in restricted housing, as required by regulations. In one of these cases, the review was delayed for nine business days and three weekends after the incarcerated person was placed in restricted housing.

We reviewed the classification committee records to determine whether the department conducted an initial classification hearing within 10 days of each of the 65 incarcerated person's placement in restricted housing. We identified only two cases in which the initial classification hearing occurred more than 10 days after the individuals were first placed in a restricted housing unit; both occurred 16 days after initial placement. In one case, the committee's notes indicated the hearing was delayed because it was not held before the incarcerated person was transferred to another prison for a court proceeding.

The Department Has Struggled to Achieve Two Objectives of the Revised Regulations: Reducing the Number of Transfers and Increasing Participation in Rehabilitation Programming

The current regulations organize restricted housing based on the mental health care needs of the incarcerated population. The department's goals included reducing staff workload by limiting unnecessary transfers between restricted housing units. Of the 65 restricted housing placements we reviewed, 35 involved transfers to other prisons following each incarcerated person's initial placement. Twenty-two of the 35 cases involved transfers of individuals requiring mental health treatment—eight at the EOP level of care and 14 at the CCCMS level of care—after their initial placement in restricted housing. Sixteen, or 73 percent, of the 22 transfers occurred only because the regulations required transfer to a designated restricted housing prison based on the individual's level of care. Of the 16 required transfers, 14 occurred within the required 30-day time frame; however, two transfers did not meet the required timeline. In both cases, the incarcerated people had been receiving mental health services at the CCCMS level of care and were placed in general population restricted housing and therefore required



a transfer to a prison with a CCCMS restricted housing unit.

Even though the department generally met transfer timelines, we question whether transferring EOP and CCCMS patients to restricted housing at different prisons is either necessary or the best use of departmental resources. The 16 required transfers we reviewed resulted in moves from 14 prisons statewide.

Restricted Housing Unit Programming Credits and the Shift to Behavior-Based Release

To meet the goal of reducing the amount of time incarcerated people spend in restricted housing, the department shifted toward a model that rewards positive behavior. A part of this reform is the restricted housing unit programming credit, a process that allows individuals serving set terms in restricted housing to earn their way back to the general population sooner through a voluntary rehabilitative-programming reward system.

To determine whether incarcerated people earned credits through this system to reduce their terms, we reviewed classification committee records for 65 people in restricted housing from November 1, 2023, through June 30, 2025. Of these 65 cases, 41 involved individuals with determinate restricted housing terms. Only 20 of these cases contained evidence that the incarcerated person participated in rehabilitative programs and earned enough credits to reduce their restricted housing unit term. In 20 other cases, we did not find any evidence in classification committee records that the incarcerated individuals participated in rehabilitative programs, even though available information indicated they were eligible to participate.

In the final case, records show some participation in the programming credit system, but the hours completed did not reduce the restricted housing unit term. In this instance, the incarcerated person completed 9.33 hours of programming by the hearing date but did not receive any credit because the hours did not meet the department's minimum requirement of 20 hours.

Recommendations

Despite Significant Revisions to the Restricted Housing Term Matrix, the Number of Rules Violations, Incidents Requiring the Use of Force, and Incidents of Violence Have Not Decreased

1. The department should determine how the transition to the new restricted housing policy, particularly the removal of specific disciplinary categories and the reduction of disciplinary terms, has affected the number of disciplinary incidents and incidents of violence within restricted housing units and among the general population.
2. The department should consider returning drug-related rules violations to the term matrix.

The Department Did Not Ensure Staff Offered the Minimum Required Out-of-Cell Time to the Restricted Housing Population

1. Departmental and prison-level management should routinely review the unit report summaries available to them in the ARHR system and require corrective action when units do not comply with out-of-cell-time requirements.
2. Prison management should document reasons for not meeting weekly out-of-cell-time requirements and discuss those reasons with staff to identify learning opportunities and address future needs.



Recommendations

3. Prison management should ensure that EOP and CCCMS patients in restricted housing are offered the minimum therapeutic services required by departmental policy.
4. Prison management should document their reviews of weekly ARHR activity to ensure accountability, routine monitoring, and corrective actions.
5. Custody and mental health staff should also conduct routine reconciliations of their records for CCCMS and EOP restricted housing units to ensure accurate reporting and improve monitoring and oversight.

In Some Cases, Administrative Reviews and Classification Committee Hearings for Incarcerated People Placed in Restricted Housing Were Not Conducted Timely or Documented Consistently

1. The department should ensure an administrative review is conducted for every restricted housing placement on the first business day following placement and retain documentation of the review.
2. The department should implement enhanced monitoring controls to verify consistent and accurate use of the automated restricted housing unit placement notice to document the following:
 - a. The date and time of the administrative review and incarcerated person interview.
 - b. The name and rank of the administrative reviewer.

- c. The rationale and supporting evidence for the decision to retain the incarcerated person in restricted housing or release the incarcerated person from restricted housing.
- d. The review of every restricted housing placement for continued retention within 10 days of initial placement.

The Department Has Struggled to Achieve Two Objectives of the Revised Regulations: Reducing the Number of Transfers and Increasing Participation in Rehabilitation Programming

1. The department should consider designating cells for EOP and CCCMS patients in restricted housing units where they are already housed.
 - a. If the prison where they are housed does not have a restricted housing unit, the department should consider placing EOP and CCCMS patients at the closest prison that has both a restricted housing unit and mental health staff available to provide necessary treatment.
2. The department should consider changing the programming credit system to allow for prorated credits and explore ways to encourage increased participation in the rehabilitative programming reward system for early release from restricted housing.

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