Russell W. Hinton, State Auditor

Performance Audit

Department of Corrections
Work Release Program
July 2001

Performance Audit Operations Division
Department of Audits and Accounts
254 Washington St., S.W.
Atlanta, GA 30334-8400

Background

The Work Release Program allows state prisoners nearing the end of their prison term to obtain employment outside of a correctional institution to aid in their re-entry into the community. Program participants are assigned to six community-based Transitional Centers, which are minimum-security, residential facilities that also provide education and counseling programs to their residents. The Program is under the Facilities Division of the Department of Corrections (DOC).

Inmate Selection For Participation In The Work Release Program

Of the 14,830 inmates released from Georgia prisons during calendar year 2000, 1,051 (7%) successfully completed the Work Release Program. Inmates can be referred to Work Release by the State Board of Pardons and Paroles or by a DOC institution. As can be seen in **Appendix A**, which depicts Work Release Program activity during calendar year 2000, the Board of Pardons and Paroles made 59% of the 2,308 inmate referrals to Work Release, with the remaining 41% coming from DOC institutions. The Department anticipates that in the future more inmates will be released without parole supervision; therefore the DOC will be referring a higher proportion of the inmates who enter the Work Release Program. The DOC Inmate Classification Unit is responsible for approving all inmates placed in the Work Release Program (see **Appendix B** for screening selection criteria).

Once the Classification Unit approves the referral, male inmates are placed on a waiting list to be sent to either the Pre-Transitional Unit (PTU) at Autry State Prison or directly to a Transitional Center. The PTU further evaluates the inmate's suitability for Work Release. The PTU program lasts for approximately ten weeks; however the inmate may remain at the Unit until space becomes available at a Transitional Center. While at the PTU, the inmate participates in counseling and work details. Female inmates are sent directly to a Transitional Center since there is no PTU for female inmates.

Transitional Center Operations

There are currently six Transitional Centers throughout the state (four male, two female), with an ability to house 921 inmates. However, some of the Transitional Center beds are used by maintenance workers, who are not Work Release Program participants, but assist in the general upkeep of Transitional Centers or in the maintenance of state facilities (such as the Georgia State

Patrol Headquarters, the State Capitol Complex, and the Governor's Mansion). As of April 2001, 718 (78%) of the 921 beds at Transitional Centers were occupied by Work Release Program residents and 203 (22%) were occupied by maintenance workers. As can be seen in **Appendix C**, there are plans for adding five new centers and expanding an existing center, which will increase the number of available beds for Work Release Program residents to 1,675. The Department of Corrections hopes to have all the proposed beds available by the end of calendar year 2002.

Work Release residents must have outside employment to stay at a Transitional Center. In addition to maintaining employment, they must also participate in various programs (such as, Substance Abuse, Victim's Impact, Anger Management, Life Skills, GED preparation, and Job Readiness) and participate in upkeep of the facility. The average length of stay at Transitional Centers is approximately six months.

Work Release Program Activity Data

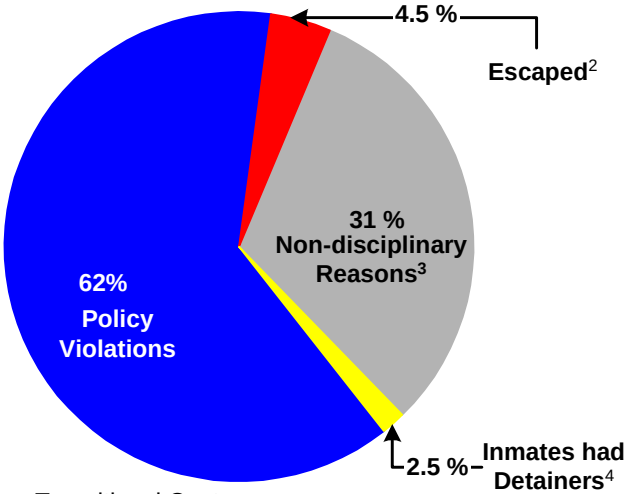
As can be seen in **Exhibit 1**, 1,051 inmates (840 men and 211 women) completed the Work Release Program in calendar year 2000. Over the same time period, 318 inmates (217 men and 101 women) were removed from the Work Release Program and returned to prison. Most dismissals from the Program were due to inmates violating Transitional Center policies. (See **Exhibit 1** for a summary of the reasons for dismissals from the Program.)

Exhibit 1
Transitional Center Work Release Program Activity
(Calendar Year 2000)

Inmates that Completed[1] the Program

TC Name	Men	Women	TOTAL
Albany	199		199
Atlanta	198		198
Macon	206		206
Savannah	237		237
Metro		128	128
Savannah		83	83
TOTAL	840	211	1,051

Reasons for 318 Dismissals



[1] Inmates either paroled (874) or discharged (177) from a Transitional Center.
[2] Primarily a result of inmates not returning from work.
[3] Medical reasons, changes in parole dates, adverse community reactions, etc.
[4] Detainers are a notice of a new or outstanding charge being placed on an inmate. (DOC will not release an inmate without the detainer being satisfied.)

SOURCE: Transitional Center Records

Funding

In fiscal year 2000, DOC records indicate that the six Transitional Centers cost approximately $14.2 million to operate, with state funds funding 99% of center operations. Once employed, inmates housed at Transitional Centers are required to contribute towards their room and board. In fiscal year 2000, Work Release Program participants were paid an average wage of $7 an hour and earned a total of $4.7 million in wages, including state and federal taxes which would not have been paid had the inmate been in a prison facility. The inmates paid $1.6 million for room and board which was remitted to the state treasury. As can be seen in **Exhibit 2**, the net cost per day per inmate in Transitional Centers was estimated to be $40.48 while the cost per day per inmate at Georgia's prisons was $49.65.

Exhibit 2
Cost Per Day Per Inmate at DOC Institutions
Fiscal Year 2000

DOC Institutions	Cost Per Day Per Inmate	Estimated Average Daliy Inmate Contribution Towards Room and Board	Estimated Net Cost Per Day Per Inmate [1]
Transitional Centers	$45.79	($5.31)	$40.48
State Prisons	$49.65	NA	$49.65

[1]Includes total cost less the amount contributed by inmates for room and board.

SOURCE: DOC records

Audit Objective, Scope and Methodology

The objectives of this audit were to determine the extent that DOC had:

- **measured the effectiveness of the Work Release Program;**
- **identified the factors that influence the success of the Work Release Program; and,**
- **assessed the impact the PTU had on screening offenders for placement in the Work Release Program.**

The audit was conducted in accordance with generally accepted government auditing standards for performance audits and focused on fiscal years 2000 and 2001. The audit methodology included reviews of DOC's standard operating procedures, reviews of records, interviews with DOC and Board of Pardons and Paroles personnel and on-site visits to the six Transitional Centers and to the Pre-Transitional Unit.

The entire report was discussed with appropriate personnel in the Department of Corrections (DOC) and a draft copy was provided for their review. DOC personnel were invited to provide a written response to the report and to indicate areas in which they planned to take corrective action. Pertinent responses from DOC are reflected in the report as appropriate.

Recommendations and Agency Responses

Program Effectiveness Measures

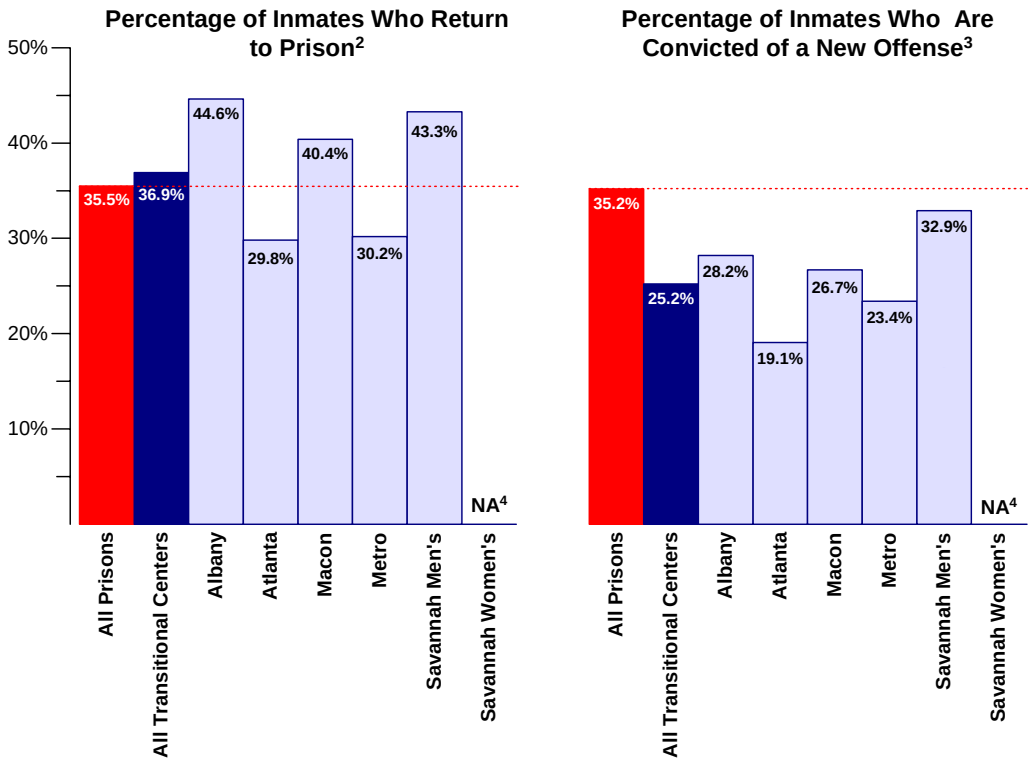
The Department of Corrections has agreed to measure the effectiveness of the Work Release Program by analyzing the return to prison rates and conviction rates of inmates who complete the Program.

The Program has goals and objectives "to develop individual self-discipline and to promote skills required for positive re-entry into the community"; however, they do not measure the overall effectiveness of the Program. DOC personnel indicated that the purpose of the Program is to help reintegrate inmates back into society so they can lead productive lives and not re-enter the prison system. DOC personnel also indicated that they considered Program "failures" to be inmates who graduate from the Work Release Program but are subsequently returned to prison. However, at the time of the audit the Program had no summarized information on "return to prison rates" or "conviction rates" for completers of the Work Release Program. While the Department generated reports in October 1997 and in December 2000 that included Transitional Center return-to-prison statistics, this information was not shared with Program personnel and was not used to measure the overall effectiveness of the Work Release Program.

At the request of the audit team, DOC personnel modified their conviction analysis program in order to run reconviction and return-to-prison rate reports for the Work Release Program completers. As can be seen in **Exhibit 3,** the Department's review found that the average return-to-prison rates for inmates who completed the Work Release Program was 36.9% (within 36 months of their release), compared to non-program participants, which averaged 35.5%. In addition, the review found that 68% of the Transitional Center inmates who were returned to prison had been convicted of committing a new offense while practically all of the non-program participants were returned to prison because of a new conviction. DOC attributed the difference in the Transitional Centers' return-to-prison rate (36.9%) and the conviction rate (25.2%) primarily to parole revocations for technical violations. Inmates guilty of technical (or non-offense) violations would not be prosecuted (or subsequently convicted) for a new crime but would be returned to prison through a parole revocation.

Additional analysis, that would require more time than was available for this audit, would be needed to fully and properly evaluate the data provided by the Department's database review. For example, instead of "all prisons" a comparison group that more closely matched the attributes of Work Release Program completers might need to be identified and developed. In addition, analysis of differences in the attributes of completers at the different centers and differences in center operating procedures would also need to be identified and reviewed before the rate variances identified in **Exhibit 3** (on the next page) could be adequately evaluated.

Exhibit 3
Recidivism For Inmates Released in 1997 From Prisons and Transitional Centers[1]



[1] Inmates tracked for 36 months post-release
[2] Return-to-Prison rates include parole revocations, probation revocations, and reconvictions
[3] Conviction rates include inmates who are convicted for a new offense and receive a prison or probation sentence.
[4] Savannah Women's Transitional Center did not open until 1999; therefore they had no 1997 graduates.

SOURCE: Department of Correction's Office of Planning and Analysis

DOC has agreed to develop effectiveness measures for the Work Release Program**.** While data on inmates that return to prison and that are reconvicted is already available in DOC's inmate information database, additional analysis will be needed to evaluate these effectiveness measures. Comparisons of such measures to a "control group" of inmates not utilizing the Program can provide a good indication of the program's overall effectiveness and help identify if changes may be needed to make the program more effective. In addition, such effectiveness data could be very helpful in documenting the benefits of adding more Transitional Centers. Comparisons of effectiveness measures between centers can provide indicators of the relative effectiveness of the different centers so effort can be focused on the less effective centers. Innovative programs or "best practices" might also be identified at the most effective centers that could be implemented at the other centers to make them more effective. Finally, as changes are made in program operations the resulting impact on program effectiveness reflected in these measures can be monitored and evaluated.

In its response to this audit, the Department noted that its Strategic Management unit, which was responsible for planning, evaluation, and statistics, was dissolved in 1997. DOC reported that in April 2001, it formed a new division, the Programs Division, which will enhance DOC's review of all programs with emphasis on state and national "best practices" and "what works" studies to enhance Transitional Center operation and programming. The Department anticipates that the Programs Division will begin inventorying, assessing and evaluating current Departmental programming by the end of the second quarter of fiscal year 2002. In addition, it is anticipated by the end of the third quarter of fiscal year 2002, that the Programs Division will have developed data systems to yield management and evaluation data. DOC also noted that an evaluation of the Program's effectiveness should not be based solely on historical data. Other information noted by DOC that should be considered in evaluating correctional programs included: future trends in corrections (such as changes in sentencing criteria), external factors (such as level of aftercare available and economic trends), comparisons to other states and the experiences of program participants and others impacted by the programs.

Factors Influencing Work Release Success

The Department of Corrections has agreed to start analyzing the factors that they consider as having a significant impact on the success of the Work Release Program using the new effectiveness measures identified in the previous finding.

During interviews, Program personnel indicated that they felt that the participant selection process and the proximity of a Transitional Center to an inmate's home were major factors influencing the success of the Work Release Program. However, as mentioned in the previous finding the Program had never collected effectiveness data that could be used to evaluate the impact these factors actually had on Program success.

Participant Selection

Currently, referrals to the Work Release Program can be made because an inmate lacks a work history, because they have been incarcerated for a long period, and/or because they lack a suitable parole plan for release. The Program has not conducted any analysis to identify which of these types of inmates might benefit the most from the Program (or what other attributes might indicate inmates that could benefit the most from the Program).

Inmates are not prioritized for placement, but are placed in Transitional Centers on a first come, first serve basis. Some sort of prioritized participant selection process is needed since everyone that could potentially benefit from the Program is not being served. About 7% of the inmates that were released from prison during calendar year 2000 successfully completed the Work Release Program and DOC is planning an expansion to more than double the Program's capacity. While a formal projection of the number of inmates that could potentially benefit from placement in the Work Release Program has not been developed, Program personnel estimated that about a third of the inmates released from prison each year might benefit from participation in the Program.

Proximity of a Transitional Center to an Inmate's Home

Program personnel felt that placing inmates at Transitional Centers close to their home would allow the inmates to keep their work release jobs after leaving the Program and thereby increase their chances for success. While the theory seems reasonable and logical, preliminary analysis of available data indicated that placement in a Transitional Center close to an inmate's home may not significantly impact whether the inmate would be successful. Review of data on inmates released in 1997 indicated that inmates placed in a Transitional Center within 50 miles of their home county had a return-to-prison rate of 37.3%, while inmates who were placed in Transitional Centers 51 miles or more from their home county had a return-to-prison rate of 39.5%. Additional analysis to isolate other factors influencing the return to prison rates of Program participants would be needed before any overall conclusions could be drawn.

DOC needs to identify the types of inmates that could benefit the most from placement in the Work Release Program. Information on the impact of the distance of the Transitional Centers to the homes of the inmates might also be used in selecting locations for future Transitional Centers. In addition, information developed on the relative success rates of the various types of inmates should be provided to the Board of Pardons and Paroles to help them in their selection process for recommending inmates for the Work Release Program.

In their response to the audit, the DOC stated that prioritization is made somewhat difficult by an insufficient number of beds for the high number of exiting inmates. DOC noted that it is currently piloting an electronic needs assessment tool that they anticipate will assist in the referral and placement of offenders in the Work Release Program by the end of fiscal year 2002. The Department also noted that its new Programs Division will track and evaluate individual offender progress as well as program effectiveness.

The Department thought that the benefit of placing inmates at Transitional Centers close to their homes was not a theory but was fact based on first hand experience. The Department noted that its long-term plan (as identified in the October 1999 report, "Proposal for Georgia's Correctional Future – FY2001 to FY2004"), is to begin opening centers in areas where the highest number of offenders are likely to return. DOC also noted that an additional factor influencing participant selection and Transitional Center location is the Department's need to be responsive to local community expectations regarding Transitional Centers.

Impact of the Pre-Transitional Unit

The Department of Corrections has agreed to evaluate the effectiveness of its Pre-Transitional Unit (PTU) in screening inmates for the Work Release Program.

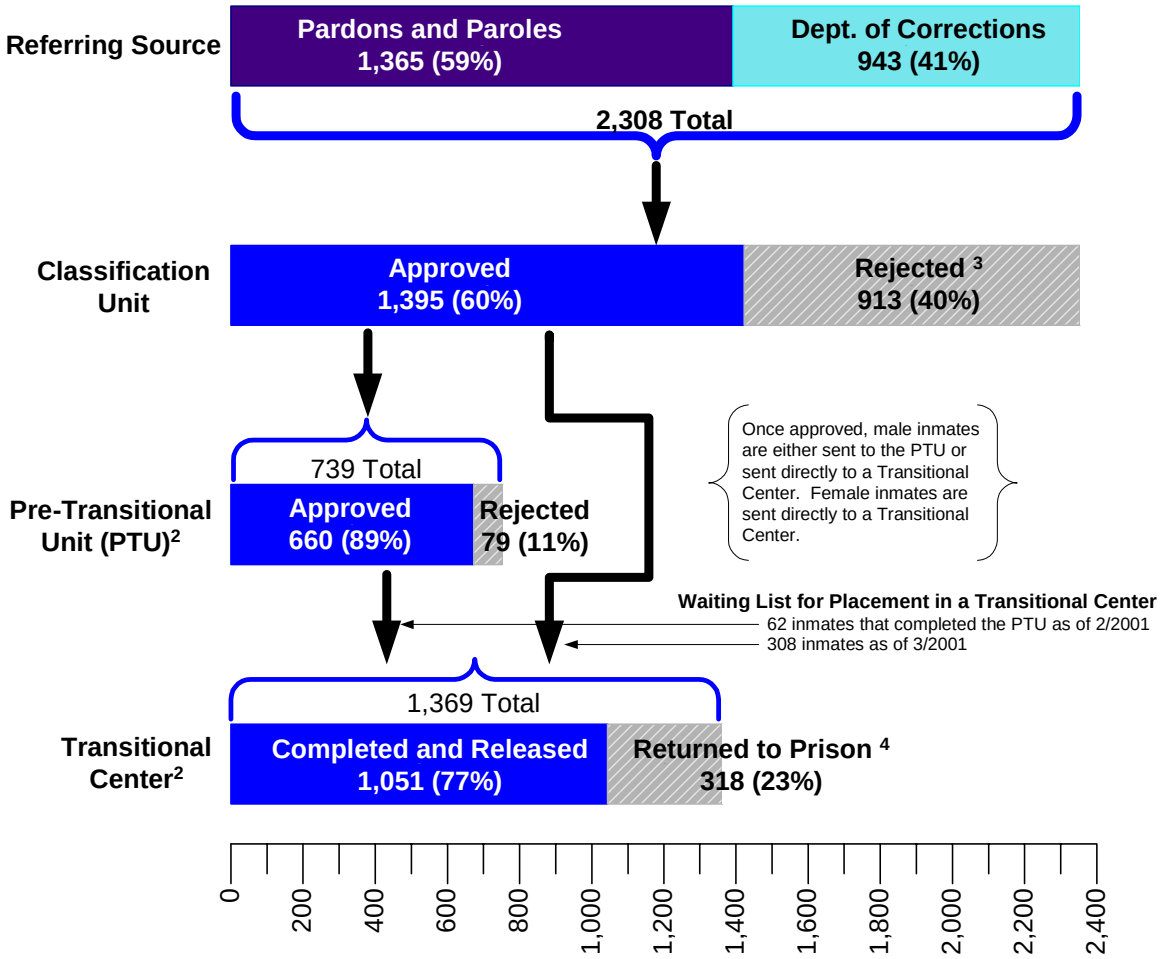
The Pre-Transitional Unit (PTU) was intended to help orient inmates to the Work Release Program and allow the Department to observe inmates so they could "screen out" problem participants before they were transferred to Transitional Centers. Although there is no formal evaluation of inmates at the PTU to determine when they are ready for transfer, DOC cited that the inmate's work performance and their attitude are the two factors reviewed when determining if the inmate will be transferred to a Transitional Center. In calendar year 2000, 11% of the 660 inmates who went to the PTU were "screened out" by the Unit and not sent to a Transitional Center.

The current capacity of the PTU is not sufficient to allow the screening of all male participants and there is no PTU for female inmates. During calendar year 2000, 1,369 inmates passed through Work Release Programs at Transitional Centers while only 739 inmates passed through the PTU. Currently, criteria has not been established regarding which inmates go through the PTU and which inmates go directly to a Transitional Center. The Department has never determined if inmates who go through the PTU are less likely to be dismissed from the Work Release Program or if they are more successful (if they have lower return-to-prison/reconviction rates) than inmates who did not go through the PTU.

The Department of Corrections should evaluate the effectiveness of its Pre-Transitional Unit (PTU). The Department should determine if screening provided by the PTU reduces dismissals of Work Release Program inmates and/or has a positive impact on the success of Work Release Program participants. If the PTU unit is effective, its use should be expanded to include all inmates. If it is determined that the PTU has little impact on inmate success, the Department should consider eliminating the Unit.

In its response to the audit, the Department agreed with the finding that the impact of the PTU Program needs further scrutiny. The Department noted that the agency's newest division, the Programs Division, will be heavily involved in this process.

Appendix A
Work Release Activity
(Activity During Calendar Year 2000)[1]



[1]14,830 prisoners were paroled or directly released from prison during CY 2000. (of these 2,308 were referred to a Transitional Center).

[2] Activity during the year. (Note - some inmates may have started in a prior year and some inmates that started during the year may still be in the unit/center at the end of the year.)

[3] Inmates not approved for a Transitional Center remain in prison.

[4] Inmates were dismissed from the Program and returned to prison (see Exhibit 2 on page 2 for the reasons for their dismissals).

SOURCE: DOC and Transitional Center Records

Appendix B
Pre-Transitional and Transitional Selection Criteria and Process

1	Female inmates with no more than eight (8) months and no less than six (6) months remaining on the sentence or until prospective release date may be eligible for pre-release consideration. Once a pre-Transitional Center becomes available for women, GDC will schedule women for pre-release on the same schedule used for men.
2	Male inmates with no more than eleven (11) months and no less than nine (9) months remaining on the sentence or until prospective release data may be eligible for Pre-Transitional Center consideration.
3	Criminal History Background: a. Inmates serving life sentences will not be considered **except for Parole Board referrals**. b. Inmates must not have a sentence involving assault against any criminal justice/law enforcement employee **except for Parole Board referrals**. c. Inmates with two or more previous convictions for assaultive offenses on record will not be considered **except for Parole Board referrals**. d. Active detainer or special notifications on file will preclude placement. e. Sex offenders (past or present) are not eligible **except for Parole Board referrals**. f. Inmates serving sentences for arson will be individually screened by Inmate Administration Classification staff upon referral. An inmate with repeated arson offenses will not be eligible. g. Inmates who have escaped from a jail, prison, transition, detention, or a Diversion Center will be ineligible for Transitional Center placement for five years **unless referred by the Parole Board**. The circumstances and/or number of escapes may preclude placement. h. Inmates removed from Transitional Centers for adjustment/disciplinary reasons should be returned to an appropriate prison. A male inmate may be returned to the Pre-Transitional facility for an adjustment period then returned to the Center. An inmate who has been removed from a Transitional Center for adjustment/ disciplinary reasons and returned to a regular prison may be considered again for pre-release after serving at least six (6) months with a clear record **only if referred by the Parole Board**. i. In most cases, an inmate cannot have more than one (1) previous placement in a Center. However, if the inmate was removed from the Center because of a detainer or other reasons beyond his or her control, then inmate may be reconsidered.
4	Skills and Abilities: The mission of a Transitional Center is set forth in SOP IID01-0001, "Mission Transitional and Diversion Centers." Selection of an inmate to participate in the Transitional program will be made on a case by case basis. If an inmate would not be employed in the free world because of his/her care needs, the inmate will not be placed in the Transitional program.
5	Security Classification: An inmate must be at least medium security prior to consideration for pre-release **except for Parole Board referrals**.
6	Disciplinary Record: Prior to selection to pre-release an inmate must have maintained at least three months with a clear record. The nature and/or number of reports may affect placement.
7	Prison Review: Upon receipt of teletype or notification from Inmate Administration of inmate's assignment to the Pre-Transitional Center or a Transitional Center, the Warden/Superintendent or designee will immediately review the inmate's file for any recent performance or adjustment problems, medical or psychiatric developments, or other factors that would prevent successful participation. a. The Warden/Superintendent or designee will immediately advise Inmate Administration of any problems identified. b. NOTE: This procedure notifies Central Office Inmate Classification of changes in the inmate's security risk or other care requirements, which might not be serviceable in the pre-Transitional or Transitional setting.

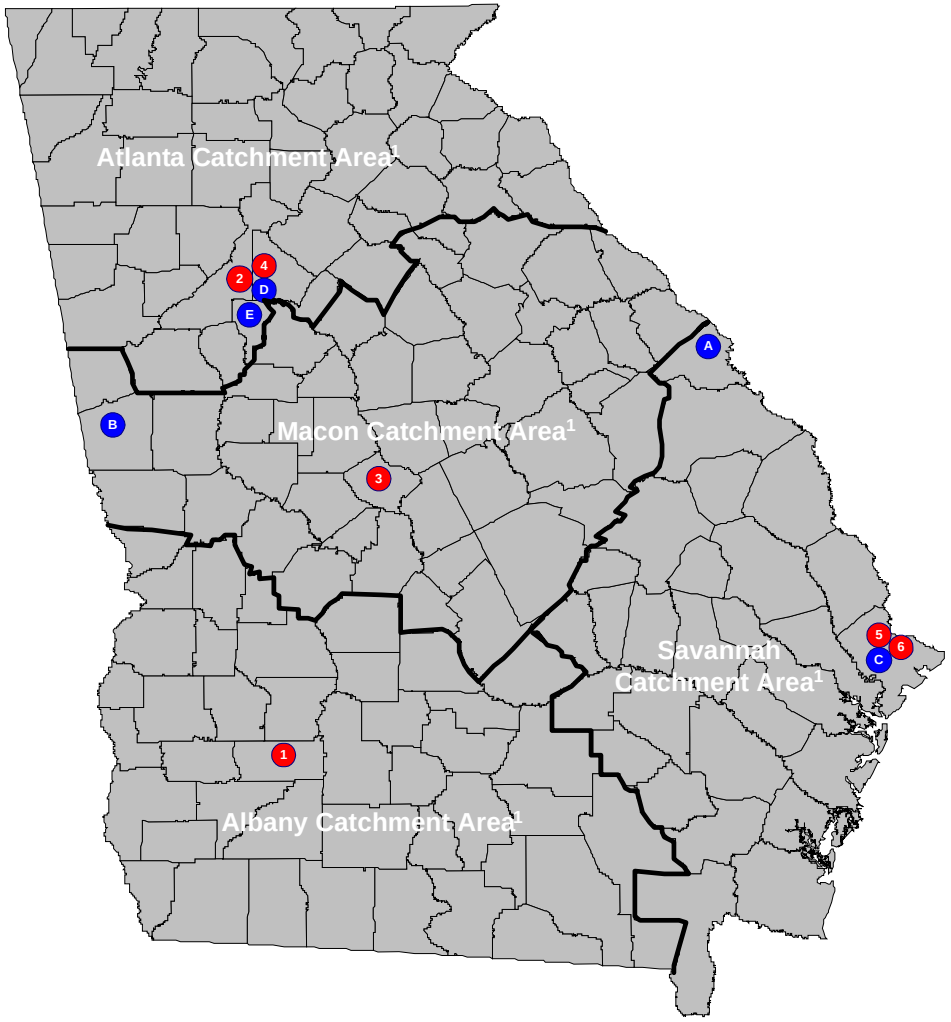
SOURCE: Department of Corrections Standard Operating Procedures *(emphasis in bold added by audit team)*

Appendix C
Transitional Center Locations and Catchment Areas

	Transitional Center	Sex of Inmate	Number of Beds[2]		
			Current	Proposed	Total
	Current Centers				
1	Albany	Male	128		128
2	Atlanta	Male	123		123
3	Macon	Male	112		112
4	Metro	Female	114	91[3]	205
5	Savannah	Male	174		174
6	Savannah	Female	67		67
	Proposed Centers				
A	Augusta	Male		174	174
B	LaGrange	Male		128	128
C	Savannah	Male		174	174
D	Atlanta	Male		195	195
E	Clayton	Male		195	195
	TOTAL		718	957	1,675

[1] Catchment Areas will change as new Centers are added.
[2] Does not include beds for maintenance personnel.
[3] Proposed facility expansion.

SOURCE: DOC Records



For additional information, please contact Paul E. Bernard, Director, Performance Audit Operations Division, at (404) 657-5220.