

OFFICE OF
INSPECTOR GENERAL OF NEBRASKA CHILD WELFARE



REPORT OF MONITORING

Subject: Youth Rehabilitation and Treatment Center Data

Fiscal Year 2025-2026

Report Date: September 15, 2026

Logan Chitty, Assistant Inspector General

Jennifer A. Carter, Inspector General
State Capitol, P.O. Box 94604
Lincoln, Nebraska 68509-4604
402-471-4211 (Office)
855-460-6784 (Toll Free)
oig@leg.ne.gov

Jurisdiction

The Office of Inspector General of Nebraska Child Welfare (OIG-CW) provides oversight and accountability for Nebraska’s child welfare and juvenile justice systems through independent investigations, system monitoring and review, and recommendations for improvement.¹ This includes oversight of the Youth Rehabilitation and Treatment Centers (YRTC), which are state facilities that are operated to provide programming and services to rehabilitate and treat juveniles committed under the Nebraska Juvenile Code.²

Background & Scope

A juvenile is committed to a YRTC by a court order placing the youth into the care and custody of the Office of Juvenile Services (OJS), which is within the Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS), and which has oversight and control over the YRTCs.³ A juvenile committed to a YRTC under OJS is thus a state ward “committed to the care and custody of [DHHS] for the purpose of obtaining health care and treatment services.”⁴ Commitment to a YRTC is intended to be a placement of last resort, as Nebraska law requires that, before a juvenile can be committed, a court must find that all levels of probation supervision and options for community-based services have been exhausted and that placement at a YRTC is a matter of immediate and urgent necessity.⁵ Each YRTC is subject to various requirements for the services and treatment that it must provide youth. These services are designed to address the youth's behavioral, mental health, educational, and other individual needs, with the goal of successfully reintegrating the youth into their home and community upon release.⁶ Only individuals ages 14 to 18 can be committed to a YRTC.⁷

There are three YRTCs in Nebraska—YRTC-Kearney, which serves male youth; YRTC-Hastings, which serves female youth; and YRTC-Lincoln, which serves both male and female youth.⁸

¹ See Neb. Rev. Stat. §§ 50-1801–50-1821.

² Neb. Rev. Stat. § 83-102(1). For more information about the YRTCs, see Neb. Dep’t of Health & Hum. Serv., *Youth Rehabilitation and Treatment Center Facilities*, <https://dhhs.ne.gov/pages/YRTC-Facilities.aspx> (last visited September 8, 2025).

³ See Neb. Rev. Stat. § 43-403(2); Neb. Rev. Stat. § 43-404. See also Neb. Rev. Stat. § 43-286(1)(b), (c).

⁴ Neb. Rev. Stat. § 43-408(1). See generally § 83-102.

⁵ See § 43-286(1)(b)(iii); *In re Interest of Alan L.*, 294 Neb. 261, 882 N.W.2d 682 (2016); *In re Interest of Nedhal A.*, 289 Neb. 711, 856 N.W.2d 565 (2014).

⁶ See, e.g., Neb. Rev. Stat. § 43-407; § 83-102.

⁷ See Neb. Rev. Stat. § 43-245(12); Neb. Rev. Stat. § 43-251.01(4).

⁸ YRTC-Kearney was founded in 1879, began receiving male and female youth in 1881, became a male-only youth facility in 1892 when a female-only YRTC opened in Geneva, and in 1997, moved from underneath the operation of the Nebraska Department of Correctional Services to DHHS; YRTC-Lincoln opened in 2020 and operates as a

In 2020, in response to the crisis at and closure of YRTC-Geneva,⁹ the Legislature enacted a law to provide increased accountability and oversight regarding the YRTCs. That law, Neb. Rev. Stat. § 50-1806(3)(a), requires OJS to report to the OIG-CW as soon as reasonably possible after any of the following incidents occur at a YRTC:

- An assault;
- An escape or elopement;
- An attempted suicide;
- Self-harm by a juvenile;
- Property damage not caused by normal wear and tear;
- The use of mechanical restraints on a juvenile;
- A significant medical event suffered by a juvenile;
- Internally substantiated violations of the Prison Rape Elimination Act (PREA).¹⁰

Nebraska law permits the OIG-CW and OJS to work in collaboration to clarify the specific parameters of the form and frequency of how the data is reported, to comply with the requirements of § 50-1806(3)(a). The OIG-CW and OJS have agreed on the basic parameters of the substance, method, and timing of the information reported to the OIG-CW since 2022. With the recent change in OJS leadership, this agreement is being reviewed and renewed. Overall, much of the data and information in the categories above is provided monthly, while more serious incidents are reported to the OIG-CW as soon as reasonably possible through critical incident reports. More details of the parameters and explanations for what is reported to the OIG-CW will be included below in the OIG-CW's analysis of the data.

Beginning this year, the OIG-CW's detailed reporting and analysis of the annual YRTC data will be published annually as a separate YRTC Monitoring Report rather than included within the OIG-CW's Annual Report, due to the large volume and complexity of the data. A summary of the YRTC Monitoring Report will then be included in the Annual Report of that same year.

program for especially high-acuity youth needing more individualized care, and is located within the Lancaster County Youth Services Center, separate from the county that provides detention services to other youth on the other side of the building; YRTC-Hastings opened in 1887, initially as an asylum for the incurably insane, was changed to the Hastings Regional Center in the 1970s, then to the Hastings Juvenile Chemical Dependency Program from 1999 to 2020, and opened as a YRTC in 2021 to serve female youth in the new buildings that were originally built for the Chemical Dependency Program. See Neb. Dep't of Health & Hum. Serv., *supra* note 2.

⁹ See Office of Inspector General of Nebraska Child Welfare, *The Deterioration and Closure of Geneva Youth Rehabilitation and Treatment Center*. January 5, 2021.

https://nebraskalegislature.gov/pdf/reports/public_counsel/Geneva_Special_Report_2021.pdf.

¹⁰ 34 U.S.C. § 30301 et seq.

To monitor the annual YRTC data, the OIG-CW reviews the data and information reported to the OIG-CW by OJS throughout the year and discusses data clarifications, questions, or concerns with the OJS or YRTC facility administrations if and when they arise. The OIG-CW also reviews relevant statutes, regulations, and policies related to the YRTCs to ensure their data and related practices are in compliance with such authorities.

Summary

The following are some key data points from the YRTC data reported to the OIG-CW for Fiscal Year (FY) 2025-2026:

- The most prevalent issues remained elevated facility censuses and relatively high rates of assaults, uses of mechanical restraints, and incidents of youth self-harm.
- Overall, the number of assaults against staff decreased at each YRTC, except for staff assaults committed by female youth at YRTC-Lincoln, which increased.
- Overall, the number of youth-on-youth assaults increased slightly at each YRTC, except for assaults committed by male youth at YRTC-Lincoln, which decreased.
- The severity of injuries due to assaults also decreased, except at YRTC-Kearney, which reported that a larger number of staff assaults required staff to seek medical care off-campus compared to last year.
- No YRTC reported that a youth escaped from its campus. YRTC-Kearney was the only facility to report off-campus elopements and a significant increase in attempted escapes.
- There was an overall increase in self-harm incidents reported by the YRTCs except for YRTC-Kearney, which saw a decrease. The female youth at YRTC-Hastings continued to have the highest numbers of reported self-harm incidents. There were again no reported suicide attempts at any facility.
- There were fewer PREA investigations reported at YRTC-Lincoln and YRTC-Hastings than last year. The number of PREA investigations at YRTC-Kearney, however, increased significantly, related in large part to the sexual abuse allegations against staff that were the subject of the OIG-CW's investigative report.¹¹

¹¹ See Office of Inspector General of Nebraska Child Welfare, *Allegations of Sexual Abuse of Youth by Staff at the Youth Rehabilitation and Treatment Center at Kearney*. July 27, 2026.
[https://nebraskalegislature.gov/pdf/reports/oig_childwelfare/OIG-CW%20Report,%20YRTC-K%20Sexual%20Abuse%20Investigation%20PUBLIC%20FINAL%20\(with%20Appendices%207.28.26\).pdf](https://nebraskalegislature.gov/pdf/reports/oig_childwelfare/OIG-CW%20Report,%20YRTC-K%20Sexual%20Abuse%20Investigation%20PUBLIC%20FINAL%20(with%20Appendices%207.28.26).pdf).

In addition to the data monitoring and analysis, the OIG-CW generally visits each YRTC facility and communicates with the facilities' administration, staff, and committed youth when appropriate. In FY 2025-2026, the OIG-CW only made two facility visits to the YRTCs—both to YRTC-Kearney for general purposes—which is less than it typically does each year, due to a lack of capacity given the office's limited staff and resources, which was primarily focused on the large investigation into the many allegations of sexual abuse at YRTC-Kearney for the majority of the year.

Further, the OIG-CW's collaboration with the Ombudsman's Office, particularly the Deputy Ombudsman for Institutions, who more frequently visits and communicates with the administration and youth at state facilities like the YRTCs, helps to keep the OIG-CW informed of any updates and current issues regarding the YRTCs and the care of the youth committed there. This last fiscal year, the OIG-CW therefore relied more heavily on the Deputy Ombudsman's contact with the YRTCs than normal, as well as the information learned about OJS and the YRTCs, but especially YRTC-Kearney, through that investigation rather than a typical visit.

YRTC Reported Data FY 2025-2026

YRTC Censuses

In FY 2025-2026, each YRTC yet again continued the recent years' trend of an elevated census for at least part of the fiscal year, sometimes approaching the limit of its facilities' capacity. Given their relative capacities, YRTC-Kearney continues to have a significantly higher census than any other facility, and YRTC-Lincoln continues to have the lowest census, slightly less than YRTC-Hastings. While the censuses at YRTC-Lincoln and YRTC-Hastings were slightly higher, they remained largely consistent throughout the year and similar to the previous fiscal year. YRTC-Kearney's census fluctuated more significantly throughout the year. The facility saw a significant increase in its census for half of the fiscal year—from July to December 2025—with approximately 100 youth at the facility in each of those months. Since then, the census has continuously decreased, with as few as 62 at the end of the fiscal year.

Table 1. YRTC-Kearney Census

	FY 23-24	FY 24-25	FY 25-26
Average Monthly Census	62	76.25	86
Highest Monthly Census	70	95	105
Lowest Monthly Census	55	68	62

Table 2. YRTC-Hastings Census

	FY 23-24	FY 24-25	FY 25-26
Average Monthly Census	13.42	13.42	15.75
Highest Monthly Census	20	19	19
Lowest Monthly Census	7	9	13

**Table 3. YRTC-Lincoln Census
(Combined Male & Female Youth)**

	FY 23-24	FY 24-25	FY 25-26
Average Monthly Census	11.5	11.75	13.08
Highest Monthly Census	14	16	14
Lowest Monthly Census	10	7	12

Assaults

In FY 2025-2026, as has been the norm in previous fiscal years, youth assaults of staff and youth assaults of other youth were once again the second most prevalent types of incidents that occurred after the use of mechanical restraints. Across all facilities, the total number of combined assaults in FY 2025-2026 was similar, but overall fewer than in the previous year. As has been the case in the past, the overwhelming majority of the assaults at all of the YRTC's were reportedly minor in severity and did not require significant medical treatment—even more so last year than in the previous year. Of the youth assaults of staff in this last fiscal year, approximately 50% occurred during a physical intervention with a youth.

At YRTC-Kearney, high numbers of assaults remain, especially against other youth, but the facility once again had fewer total incidents than in the previous year. The facility also had fewer staff assaults than in the previous year for the second consecutive year, and although there was an increase in youth assaults, that increase was also once again slight.

Table 4. YRTC-Kearney Assaults			
	FY 23-24	FY 24-25	FY 25-26
Youth on Staff Assaults	104	86	69
Youth on Youth Assaults	118	129	132

Of the 69 youth-on-staff assaults that occurred in FY 2025-2026 at YRTC-Kearney, 13 were severe enough to require the staff to seek off-campus medical assessment and treatment, an increase compared to the five in the previous fiscal year. Three required on-campus medical treatment beyond basic first aid, and the remaining 53 reportedly either caused no visible injury or pain or required only basic first-aid treatment. Of the 132 youth-on-youth assaults that occurred in FY 2025-2026 at YRTC-Kearney, fewer were severe than in the previous year, as none required off-campus assessment and treatment, and only two required on-campus medical treatment beyond basic first aid. The remaining 130 reportedly either caused no visible injury or pain or required only basic first-aid treatment. The continued decrease in the severity and total number of assaults at YRTC-Kearney was reflected in only two serious assault incidents reported to the OIG-CW as a critical incident, similar to the one in FY 2024-2025, but again significantly fewer than the two-dozen reported in FY 2023-2024.

The OIG-CW was, however, notified of a critical incident at YRTC-Kearney in FY 2025-2026 where a frontline staff member physically assaulted a youth. The OIG-CW reviewed video and documentation regarding the incident, and while the incident was, of course, concerning, the

staff member was promptly terminated from the facility, and the OIG-CW determined that the facility administration's response was appropriate.

YRTC-Hastings also had fewer total assault incidents compared to the previous fiscal year. The number of youth assaults in FY 2025-2026 rose, but the number of staff assaults decreased, the opposite of the previous year. Of all the YRTCs, YRTC-Hastings reported the greatest percentage increase in youth-on-youth assaults relative to the facility's census.

Table 5. YRTC-Hastings Assaults			
	FY 23-24	FY 24-25	FY 25-26
Youth on Staff Assaults	36	45	34
Youth on Youth Assaults	24	5	14

But of the 48 combined youth-on-staff assaults and youth-on-youth assaults that occurred in FY 2025-2026 at YRTC-Hastings, only one required off-campus medical assessment or treatment. All other assaults reportedly either caused no visible injury or pain or required only basic first aid treatment. This is nearly identical to the previous year, where there were 50 combined assaults, with just one requiring off-campus medical assessment or treatment, and three requiring on-campus medical treatment beyond basic first aid.

For the female youth at YRTC-Lincoln, there was yet again an increase in FY 2025-2026 in youth-on-staff assaults, as well as a very slight increase in youth-on-youth assaults. Of the entire YRTC population, the female youth at YRTC-Lincoln had the greatest percentage increase in youth-on-staff assaults in FY 2025-2026 from the previous fiscal year.

Table 6. YRTC-Lincoln Assaults (Female Youth)			
	FY 23-24	FY 24-25	FY 25-26
Youth on Staff Assaults	28	40	52
Youth on Youth Assaults	10	5	7

However, the 59 combined youth-on-staff and youth-on-youth assaults that occurred in FY 2025-2026 for the female youth at YRTC-Lincoln once again appeared to be minor in severity, as only two required on-campus medical treatment beyond basic first aid. The remaining 57 assaults reportedly either caused no visible injury or pain or required only basic first-aid treatment.

The male youth at YRTC-Lincoln were the only YRTC population to have a decrease in both types of assaults in FY 2025-2026 from the previous fiscal year. This decrease is especially positive given that the male youth at YRTC-Lincoln reported the greatest percentage increase in both types of assaults from FY 2023-2024 to FY 2024-2025.

Table 7. YRTC-Lincoln Assaults (Male Youth)			
	FY 23-24	FY 24-25	FY 25-26
Youth on Staff Assaults	15	35	27
Youth on Youth Assaults	3	22	12

Further, of the fewer combined assaults at YRTC-Lincoln for the male youth, another positive was that none required off-campus medical assessment or treatment. Similar to the female youth at YRTC-Lincoln, only one required on-campus medical treatment beyond basic first aid, and the remaining 38 assaults reportedly either caused no visible injury or pain or required only basic first-aid treatment.

Use of Mechanical Restraints

For purposes of the YRTC data reported to the OIG-CW, “mechanical restraints” refers to wrist and ankle restraints. The YRTCs report each incident where staff use mechanical restraints on a youth, other than when the youth is being transported. The use of mechanical restraints is traditionally the most common type of incident that the YRTCs report to the OIG-CW. In FY 2025-2026, that remained true, but the total number reported from all facilities was fewer than in FY 2024-2025. In particular, the use of mechanical restraints in FY 2025-2026 was lower for all facilities except the female youth at YRTC-Lincoln. This data correlates with the assault data reported in FY 2025-2026, as every facility but the female youth at YRTC-Lincoln reported fewer assault incidents as well, as noted above. Given that youth are almost always placed in mechanical restraints when being secured or restrained after they commit an assault, the number of mechanical restraint incidents and assault incidents are often roughly proportionate.

Table 8. YRTC-Kearney Use of Mechanical Restraints			
	FY 23-24	FY 24-25	FY 25-26
Use of Mechanical Restraints	234	261	216

Table 9. YRTC-Hastings Use of Mechanical Restraints			
	FY 23-24	FY 24-25	FY 25-26
Use of Mechanical Restraints	84	58	50

Table 10. YRTC-Lincoln Use of Mechanical Restraints (Female Youth)			
	FY 23-24	FY 24-25	FY 25-26
Use of Mechanical Restraints	44	32	57

Table 11 YRTC-Lincoln Use of Mechanical Restraints (Male Youth)			
	FY 23-24	FY 24-25	FY 25-26
Use of Mechanical Restraints	26	41	31

Escapes and Elopements

The data reported to the OIG-CW for escape incidents includes youth escapes and attempted escapes from the YRTC facilities, as well as elopements when youth are permitted an off-campus furlough or day pass but do not return to the facility. In FY 2025-2026, the total number of escape incidents increased from the previous year, but the increase was almost entirely attributable to an increase at YRTC-Kearney. YRTC-Lincoln reported no escape incidents for both its male and female youth for the second consecutive year. YRTC-Hastings only reported one attempted escape incident. Ten of the 11 total combined escape incidents at the YRTCs occurred at YRTC-Kearney, a significant increase in escape incidents for that facility, which reported just one in FY 2024-2025. Seven of those 10 incidents were attempted escapes, and the remaining three were elopements during off-campus furloughs for the youth. All three youth who eloped during the furloughs were eventually found and returned to the YRTC's care. Despite this off-campus concern, YRTC-Kearney has continued to show improvement in its on-campus security, as it again reported fewer or no on-campus escapes, which was a much more prevalent concern in years past, with nine escapes in FY 2022-2023 and six escapes in FY 2023-2024.

Table 12. YRTC-Kearney Escape Incidents			
	FY 23-24	FY 24-25	FY 25-26
Escapes	6	0	0
Attempted Escapes	1	0	7
Elopiements	3	1	3

Table 13. YRTC-Hastings Escape Incidents			
	FY 23-24	FY 24-25	FY 25-26
Escapes	0	0	0
Attempted Escapes	0	0	1
Elopiements	1	0	0

Table 14. YRTC-Lincoln Escape Incidents (Female Youth)			
	FY 23-24	FY 24-25	FY 25-26
Escapes	0	0	0
Attempted Escapes	0	0	0
Elopiements	0	0	0

Table 15. YRTC-Lincoln Escape Incidents (Male Youth)			
	FY 23-24	FY 24-25	FY 25-26
Escapes	3	0	0
Attempted Escapes	0	0	0
Elopiements	0	0	0

Self-Harm and Attempted Suicide

The reported incidents of self-harm at the YRTCs in FY 2025-2026 were collectively higher than in the previous year. Unlike the previous year, where only one facility had increased incidents compared with the year before that, all but one facility in FY 2025-2026 reported an increase in self-harm incidents. Female YRTC youth were again involved in many more self-harm incidents than their male counterparts. More self-harm incidents in FY 2025-2026 occurred in the last two quarters of the fiscal year, between January and June 2026, than in the first two quarters. A

continued positive trend, however, is that there were again no reported incidents of attempted suicide at any of the YRTC's in FY 2025-2026.

YRTC-Kearney was the lone facility with a decrease in self-harm incidents in FY 2025-2026, with nearly half as many, whereas it was the lone facility to report an increase in the previous year. Like in past years, the vast majority of the self-harm incidents reportedly caused minor injuries or no injuries at all. These self-harm incidents at YRTC-Kearney primarily involved youth tying clothing or other items around their neck, banging their head against the wall, floor, or other objects, or superficially scratching their skin.

Table 16. YRTC-Kearney Self-Harm & Attempted Suicide			
	FY 23-24	FY 24-25	FY 25-26
Self-Harm Incidents	25	33	18
Suicide Attempts	0	0	0

YRTC-Hastings once again had by far the most self-harm incidents amongst all YRTC facilities, with almost double the number of self-harm incidents as the other YRTC's combined. The facility reported considerably more self-harm incidents than in the previous fiscal year, but still less than two years prior, which was the most the facility has ever reported to date.

Table 17. YRTC-Hastings Self-Harm & Attempted Suicide			
	FY 23-24	FY 24-25	FY 25-26
Self-Harm Incidents	220	158	192
Suicide Attempts	0	0	0

Just as in prior years, the majority of the facility's self-harm incidents in FY 2025-2026 involved female youth scratching their skin or picking at their fingernails or wounds on their skin. After that, the most common types of self-harm involved youth banging their head against the wall, floor, or other objects, as well as tying clothing or items around their neck. Once again, nearly all of these self-harm incidents were reported to have either caused minor injuries or no injuries at all. One self-harm incident at YRTC-Hastings was reported to the OIG-CW as a critical incident in FY 2025-2026. In that incident, a youth required off-campus medical treatment after she broke a clock on a wall and swallowed pieces of glass from it.

The female youth at YRTC-Lincoln, like the female youth at YRTC-Hastings, also reported a higher number of self-harm incidents in FY 2025-2026 compared to the previous year.

Table 18. YRTC-Lincoln Self-Harm & Attempted Suicide (Female Youth)			
	FY 23-24	FY 24-25	FY 25-26
Self-Harm Incidents	78	54	86
Suicide Attempts	0	0	0

As was noted with YRTC-Hastings and YRTC-Kearney, nearly all of the self-harm incidents involving these female youth reportedly caused minor injuries or no injuries at all. The vast majority of the self-harming for the female youth at YRTC-Lincoln involved the youth tying clothing or other items around their necks.

YRTC-Lincoln reported just five self-harm incidents for its male youth in FY 2025-2026 and was once again the smallest reporter of self-harming at the YRTCs.

Table 19. YRTC-Lincoln Self-Harm & Attempted Suicide (Male Youth)			
	FY 23-24	FY 24-25	FY 25-26
Self-Harm Incidents	3	1	5
Suicide Attempts	0	0	0

In this last fiscal year, the YRTCs continued a positive trend of reporting various treatment responses and intervention strategies to address these self-harming behaviors, many of which appeared to be more individualized to each youth's needs and circumstances than in some past years. In FY 2025-2026, there were 41 unique youth who self-harmed at the YRTC facilities, less than the 51 unique self-harming youth in FY 2024-2025. Of those 41, 28 of the youth each had five or fewer incidents. Of the remaining 13 youth, 10 each had between seven and 20 incidents. Three female youth each had between 20 and 35 self-harming incidents in the fiscal year. Again, most of the incidents involved youth tying items around their necks, scratching at their skin, or banging their head against an object, each reportedly causing only minor injuries or no injuries at all. For nearly every self-harming incident, each YRTC again reported that staff were able to quickly intervene and stabilize the youth, assess them, and address their behaviors through therapy and other measures.

Significant Medical Events

For purposes of YRTC reporting, the OIG-CW and OJS consider significant medical events to be injuries, medical incidents, and chronic illnesses that result in a trip or admission to a hospital or require other off-campus medical treatment or assessment.¹² Although the YRTCs report significant medical events for both staff and youth, no YRTC reported any significant medical events for staff in FY 2025-2026. The data below therefore show only significant medical events for youth. Like previous years, all of the YRTCs reported few significant medical events, or no such events at all. In YRTC-Hastings' sole significant medical event in FY 2025-2026, as mentioned above, a youth swallowed glass in an attempt to self-harm and required medical treatment. In YRTC-Kearney's sole significant medical event, a youth had a tooth knocked out and suffered a jaw fracture and required medical treatment after horseplaying or potentially from fighting with other youth. Because the incident in question occurred in a facility restroom, and the youth involved reported inconsistent accounts of what had occurred, the facility could not definitively determine a cause for the injury.

Table 20. YRTC-Kearney Significant Medical Events			
	FY 23-24	FY 24-25	FY 25-26
Significant Medical Events	3	0	1

Table 21. YRTC-Hastings Significant Medical Events			
	FY 23-24	FY 24-25	FY 25-26
Significant Medical Events	3	2	1

Table 22. YRTC-Lincoln Significant Medical Events (Female Youth)			
	FY 23-24	FY 24-25	FY 25-26
Significant Medical Events	0	2	0

Table 23. YRTC-Lincoln Significant Medical Events (Male Youth)			
	FY 23-24	FY 24-25	FY 25-26
Significant Medical Events	4	1	0

¹² Significant medical events include incidents of self-harm and suicide attempts that require medical attention.

Property Damage

The OIG-CW and OJS have agreed that damage to property worth \$500 or more will be considered damage “not caused by normal wear and tear” and thus reported by the YRTC’s every month. Just as in previous fiscal years, there were very few of these types of incidents reported in FY 2025-2026, though each YRTC reported a slight increase from the previous year.

Table 24. YRTC-Kearney Property Damage \$500+			
	FY 23-24	FY 24-25	FY 25-26
Property Damage \$500+	3	0	2

Table 25. YRTC-Hastings Property Damage \$500+			
	FY 23-24	FY 24-25	FY 25-26
Property Damage \$500+	5	1	3

Table 26. YRTC-Lincoln Property Damage \$500+ (Female Youth)			
	FY 23-24	FY 24-25	FY 25-26
Property Damage \$500+	0	0	1

Table 27. YRTC-Lincoln Property Damage \$500+ (Male Youth)			
	FY 23-24	FY 24-25	FY 25-26
Property Damage \$500+	1	0	1

PREA Allegations

As noted previously, the YRTC’s are also statutorily required to report alleged violations of PREA. PREA is a federal law that applies to all federal, state, local, and private confinement facilities, including adult prisons and juvenile facilities like the YRTC’s. PREA was enacted to eliminate and prevent the sexual assault, abuse, and harassment of individuals in such facilities.¹³ To accomplish this purpose, PREA sets forth detailed definitions of prohibited conduct by facility staff and youth related to sexual abuse or sexual harassment, as well as strict procedures that

¹³ See 34 U.S.C. § 30302.

the facilities must undertake to investigate and respond to an alleged PREA violation.¹⁴ PREA is broad and includes both incidents of non-sexual touching or harassment between youth, and more serious allegations of sexual assault committed by youth or staff. OJS separately has its own policies and procedures that govern staff and youth conduct at the YRTC's related to sexual abuse, harassment, contact, relationships, and boundaries. These policies and procedures generally mirror and, in some respects, expand upon PREA's prohibitions.

PREA requires that every PREA allegation must be investigated and it determined whether the allegation is "substantiated," which is an allegation that was investigated and determined to have occurred, "unsubstantiated," which is an allegation that was investigated but the allegation produced insufficient evidence to make a final determination as to whether or not the event occurred, or "unfounded," which is an allegation that was investigated and determined not to have occurred.¹⁵ For every PREA allegation reviewed and investigated at the YRTC's, the finding entered was based upon the legal standard of a preponderance of the evidence.

In FY 2025-2026, a positive trend was that both YRTC-Hastings and YRTC-Lincoln reported lower numbers of total PREA investigations and PREA investigations that were substantiated for the third consecutive fiscal year.

YRTC-Kearney, however, continued to report many PREA investigations and substantiated cases. It reported 57 substantiated PREA investigations in FY 2025-2026, similar to the 55 substantiated in the previous year, both almost three times as many as in FY 2023-2024. A substantial number of the investigations at YRTC-Kearney in FY 2025-2026 involved allegations of staff members sexually abusing youth. The number of total investigations below, including those against staff, is not necessarily the total number of allegations, as a single investigation often involved numerous distinct allegations against one or multiple different perpetrators. More information regarding these PREA investigations and allegations, including facts, data, and the OIG-CW's analysis, findings, and recommendations, can be found within the OIG-CW's report of investigation completed in July 2026, "Allegations of Sexual Abuse of Youth by Staff at the Youth Rehabilitation and Treatment Center at Kearney."¹⁶

¹⁴ See generally National Standards to Prevent, Detect, and Respond to Prison Rape Under the Prison Rape Elimination Act (PREA), Juvenile Facility Standards, 28 C.F.R. § 115 (2012).

¹⁵ 28 C.F.R. § 115.5.

¹⁶ Office of Inspector General of Nebraska Child Welfare, *Allegations of Sexual Abuse of Youth by Staff at the Youth Rehabilitation and Treatment Center at Kearney*. July 27, 2026.

[https://nebraskalegislature.gov/pdf/reports/oig_childwelfare/OIG-CW%20Report,%20YRTC-K%20Sexual%20Abuse%20Investigation%20PUBLIC%20FINAL%20\(with%20Appendices%207.28.26\).pdf](https://nebraskalegislature.gov/pdf/reports/oig_childwelfare/OIG-CW%20Report,%20YRTC-K%20Sexual%20Abuse%20Investigation%20PUBLIC%20FINAL%20(with%20Appendices%207.28.26).pdf).

As has been the case in previous years, except for the allegations of staff abuse at YRTC-Kearney, most of the substantiated PREA investigations across all the YRTCs in FY 2025-2026 were youth-to-youth touching or harassment that the YRTCs classified as “behavioral,” meaning that the conduct was in violation of PREA but did not appear to be done with sexual intent. Approximately 80% of all substantiated PREA investigations this last fiscal year were deemed behavioral, slightly down from the approximately 90% of substantiated investigations being behavioral in the previous year.

Of the 166 total PREA investigations across the three facilities in FY 2025-2026, in 51 (approximately 31%), the alleged perpetrator was a staff member, due in large part to the allegations at YRTC-Kearney. Of those, only five investigations were substantiated at the time the data was reported to the OIG-CW.

In instances where a PREA allegation of youth-on-youth conduct was substantiated—often by YRTC staff conducting interviews or reviewing security camera footage—the YRTCs provided education to the youth on PREA and refreshed them on the facility policies, authored incident reports and issued rule violations, and separated youth and implemented safety plans, when necessary, as has been the norm in previous years.

Table 28. YRTC PREA Investigations						
YRTC	FY 23-24		FY 24-25		FY 25-26	
	Total	Substantiated	Total	Substantiated	Total	Substantiated
Kearney	54	20	101	55	145	57
Hastings	55	28	25	15	15	11
Lincoln (Both Male & Female)	31	13	17	3	6	2

At YRTC-Kearney:

- 57 of 145 PREA investigations were substantiated (39%), 46 of which were reportedly behavioral.
 - Of these substantiated investigations, 52 of 57 were youth-on-youth.

- 41 investigations were unfounded.
- 33 investigations were unsubstantiated.
- 14 investigations concluded that the allegation did not meet the definition of prohibited conduct under PREA.
- Approximately 47 investigations were of YRTC staff perpetrating against youth. Many of these investigations, again, involved a variety of specific claims of staff behavior within each. The allegations ranged from staff sexually abusing, touching, and harassing youth, to staff being in relationships with youth, crossing appropriate and professional boundaries with youth, and more. Of those:
 - Five were substantiated.
 - 13 were unfounded.
 - 23 were unsubstantiated.
 - Six were still pending at the time of the report to the OIG-CW due to open OJS Compliance or law enforcement investigations at that time.

At YRTC-Hastings:

- The only substantiated PREA violations involved youth-on-youth incidents.
- 11 of 16 PREA investigations were substantiated (69%), eight of which were reportedly behavioral.
- Three investigations were unfounded.
- Three investigations were unsubstantiated.
- Three investigations were of YRTC staff perpetrating against youth. All of these allegations were unfounded.
 - All of those allegations were of staff sexually harassing youth or crossing appropriate and professional boundaries.

At YRTC-Lincoln:

- The only substantiated PREA violations involved youth-on-youth incidents.
- Two of six PREA investigations were substantiated (33%), both of which were reportedly behavioral.
- One investigation was unfounded.
- Three investigations were unsubstantiated.
- One investigation involved a YRTC staff member perpetrating against youth. This allegation was of staff sexually harassing youth and was unsubstantiated.

Conclusion

The OIG-CW appreciates DHHS, specifically the OJS and YRTC facility administrators, as well as the OJS Compliance administration and staff, for its robust and timely data reporting to the OIG-CW and cooperation with the OIG-CW in its effort to monitor the YRTC system. The OIG-CW looks forward to continued collaboration with DHHS to ensure transparency regarding the services and treatment afforded to the youth committed to the YRTCs.