



# STATE OF NORTH CAROLINA

**FISCAL CONTROL AUDIT REPORT ON  
DARE COUNTY CLERK OF SUPERIOR COURT  
MANTEO, NORTH CAROLINA**

**FOR THE PERIOD SEPTEMBER 1, 2003 THROUGH FEBRUARY 29, 2004**

**OFFICE OF THE STATE AUDITOR**

**RALPH CAMPBELL, JR.**

**STATE AUDITOR**

**FISCAL CONTROL AUDIT REPORT ON  
DARE COUNTY CLERK OF SUPERIOR COURT  
MANTEO, NORTH CAROLINA  
FOR THE PERIOD SEPTEMBER 1, 2003 THROUGH FEBRUARY 29, 2004**

**THE HONORABLE MERLEE T. AUSTIN**



Ralph Campbell, Jr.  
State Auditor

STATE OF NORTH CAROLINA  
Office of the State Auditor

2 S. Salisbury Street  
20601 Mail Service Center  
Raleigh, NC 27699-0601  
Telephone: (919) 807-7500  
Fax: (919) 807-7647  
Internet <http://www.osa.state.nc.us>

## AUDITOR'S TRANSMITTAL

---

The Honorable Michael F. Easley, Governor  
The General Assembly of North Carolina  
The Honorable Merlee T. Austin, Clerk of Superior Court

This report presents the results of our fiscal control audit of the Dare County Clerk of Superior Court for the period September 1, 2003 through February 29, 2004. Our work was performed by authority of Article 5A of Chapter 147 of the *North Carolina General Statutes* and was conducted in accordance with the standards contained in *Government Auditing Standards* issued by the Comptroller General of the United States. The objective of a fiscal control audit is to gather and evaluate evidence about selected internal control policies and procedures designed to ensure: (1) reliable financial accounting and reporting and/or (2) compliance with finance-related laws and regulations. Should any information arise during the audit indicating that significant abuse may have occurred, the audit objective may be extended to include internal control designed to prevent abuse and to determine whether the abuse did in fact occur and its impact. Abuse involves behavior that is deficient or improper when compared with behavior that a prudent person would consider reasonable and necessary business practice.

The results of our audit disclosed no internal control deficiencies or instances of noncompliance or abuse that are considered reportable under *Government Auditing Standards*.

*North Carolina General Statutes* require the State Auditor to make audit reports available to the public. Copies of audit reports issued by the Office of the State Auditor may be obtained through one of the options listed in the back of this report.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads 'Ralph Campbell, Jr.'.

Ralph Campbell, Jr.  
State Auditor

# TABLE OF CONTENTS

---

	PAGE
BACKGROUND INFORMATION .....	1
OBJECTIVES, SCOPE, METHODOLOGY, AND RESULTS .....	3
DISTRIBUTION OF AUDIT REPORT .....	7

## **BACKGROUND INFORMATION**

---

The office of the Clerk of Superior Court is created by the North Carolina Constitution which mandates that there be a Clerk of Superior Court for each county. Under the constitution, it is the responsibility of the General Assembly to prescribe jurisdiction and the powers of the Clerk. Laws of the General Assembly regarding clerks must be uniformly applied in every county in the State.

Voters of each county elect the Clerk of Superior Court to a four-year term. Clerks are paid by the State, with their salaries scaled in accordance with the population of their counties. The Clerk appoints the assistants, deputies and employees in his or her office. The number of assistants and deputies that each clerk may employ varies from county to county depending on the volume of business. Assistant and deputy clerks are paid on a salary schedule fixed by the Administrative Office of the Courts based on education and years of service in the Clerk's office; the maximum and minimum salaries within that scale are fixed by the General Assembly.

The responsibilities of the Clerk are numerous and varied. The Clerk, as a judicial officer of the Superior Court, has judicial responsibilities. The Clerk is judge of probate; that is, the Clerk handles the probate of wills (proceedings to determine if a paper writing is a valid will) and the administration of estates of decedents, minors and incompetents. The Clerk also hears a variety of special proceedings such as adoptions, incompetency determinations and partitions of land and is empowered to issue arrest and search warrants and to exercise the same powers as a magistrate with respect to taking pleas of guilty to minor littering, traffic, wildlife, boating, marine fisheries, alcoholic beverage, State park recreation and worthless-check offenses.

The Clerk is also responsible for all clerical and record-keeping functions of the Superior Court and District Court. The Clerk operates a unified record-keeping system for all civil actions, special proceedings, estates, criminal actions, juvenile actions, minutes of the court, judgments, liens, lis pendens, and numerous other records required by law. The Clerk maintains the judgment docket, is custodian of evidence in civil and criminal trials, and issues civil summons and subpoenas. In addition, the Clerk invests money received and held by his or her office in trust and receives and administers insurance or other money on behalf of minors and incapacitated adults.

[ This Page Left Blank Intentionally ]

# **OBJECTIVES, SCOPE, METHODOLOGY, AND RESULTS**

---

## **OBJECTIVES**

As authorized by Article 5A of Chapter 147 of the *North Carolina General Statutes* and in accordance with the standards contained in *Government Auditing Standards* issued by the Comptroller General of the United States, we have conducted a fiscal control audit at the Dare County Clerk of Superior Court.

The objective of a fiscal control audit is to gather and evaluate evidence about selected internal control policies and procedures designed to ensure: (1) reliable financial accounting and reporting and/or (2) compliance with finance-related laws and regulations. Should any information arise during the audit indicating that significant abuse may have occurred, the audit objective may be extended to include internal control designed to prevent abuse and to determine whether the abuse did in fact occur and its impact. Abuse involves behavior that is deficient or improper when compared with behavior that a prudent person would consider reasonable and necessary business practice.

Management is responsible for establishing and maintaining effective internal control. Internal control is a process designed to provide reasonable assurance that relevant objectives are achieved. Because of inherent limitations in internal control, errors or fraud may nevertheless occur and not be detected. Also, projections of any evaluation of internal control to future periods are subject to the risk that conditions may change or compliance with policies and procedures may deteriorate.

## **SCOPE**

Our audit scope covered the period September 1, 2003 through February 29, 2004 and included selected internal controls in the following areas:

### General

*Control Environment* - The control environment consists of the actions, policies, and procedures that reflect the overall attitude of top management about control and its importance to the entity. The control environment sets the tone of the organization, influencing the control consciousness of its employees.

*Information System Controls* - Information system controls include activities that relate to many computerized information system applications and support the effective functioning of application controls. Information system controls include access and end-user controls.

### Financial Accounting and Reporting

*Cash and Investment Cycle* - The cash and investment cycle generally consists of the activities associated with the custody of cash and investments. Financial statement accounts typically impacted by the cycle include cash, certificates of deposit, and other investments.

## **OBJECTIVES, SCOPE, METHODOLOGY, AND RESULTS (CONTINUED)**

*Cash Receipts Cycle* – The cash receipts cycle generally consists of the activities associated with the receipt of cash. All financial statement accounts are impacted by this cycle.

*Cash Disbursements Cycle* – The cash disbursements cycle generally consists of the activities associated with disbursing cash for items other than operating and payroll costs. All financial statement accounts are impacted by this cycle.

### **Finance-Related Compliance**

Listed below are the compliance areas with one or more examples of the criteria for each.

*Cash Management and Investments* – Laws and regulations set limits on authorized deposits and investments. Moneys are required to be deposited in approved depositories and invested in specific investment types. Accounts must be protected with adequate insurance and collateral. Also, disbursements that are unclaimed by payees for a prescribed time period are often required to be remitted to the State Treasurer in accordance with the State of North Carolina's Escheats and Abandoned Property Program.

*Deposit of Receipts* – Laws and regulations require deposit of moneys as soon as possible in order to safeguard assets and to enhance the cash management and investment program. Receipts over a specified amount are required to be deposited on a daily basis.

*Annual Financial Reporting* – Laws and regulations require preparation of annual financial report information in a prescribed format and within a prescribed timeframe. Financial statement information is required to be filed with the Administrative Office of the Courts timely after year-end.

*Case Files* – Laws and regulations set record maintenance and security requirements. Records are required to be filed in a secure location using a uniform indexing system.

*Costs and Fees* – Laws and regulations set costs and fees to be charged. Uniform costs and fees are required to be charged as established by State law.

*Special Provisions* – Laws and regulations impose specific requirements on particular entities or activities. Partial payment collections are required to be distributed in the order prescribed by State law. Other special provisions include the investment of accounts greater than \$2,000, record retention requirements, property held for safekeeping procedures, and review procedures over monthly aging reports.



## **OBJECTIVES, SCOPE, METHODOLOGY, AND RESULTS (CONCLUDED)**

### **METHODOLOGY**

To accomplish our audit objectives, we gained an understanding of internal control, performed tests of control effectiveness, and performed corroborating direct tests of the accounting records, reports, and/or compliance, as we considered necessary in the circumstances. Specifically, we performed procedures such as interviewing personnel, observing operations; reviewing policies, analyzing accounting records, and examining documentation supporting recorded transactions and balances. Our procedures were more limited than would be necessary to give an opinion on internal control, and accordingly, we do not express such an opinion.

### **RESULTS**

The results of our audit disclosed no internal control deficiencies or instances of noncompliance or abuse that are considered reportable under *Government Auditing Standards*.

The purpose of this report is to provide management and oversight organizations recommendations needed to improve internal control over financial accounting and reporting and compliance with finance-related laws and regulations. Consequently, reporting on accomplishments in areas that appear to be functioning properly is beyond the scope of this audit.

[ This Page Left Blank Intentionally ]

## **DISTRIBUTION OF AUDIT REPORT**

---

In accordance with General Statutes 147-64.5 and 147-64.6(c)(14), copies of this report have been distributed to the public officials listed below. Additional copies are provided to other legislators, state officials, the press, and the general public upon request.

### **EXECUTIVE BRANCH**

The Honorable Michael F. Easley  
The Honorable Beverly M. Perdue  
The Honorable Richard H. Moore  
The Honorable Roy A. Cooper, III  
Mr. David T. McCoy  
Mr. Robert L. Powell

Governor of North Carolina  
Lieutenant Governor of North Carolina  
State Treasurer  
Attorney General  
State Budget Officer  
State Controller

### **JUDICIAL BRANCH**

The Honorable Merlee T. Austin  
The Honorable John M. Kennedy  
Mr. Steve Lusk

Dare County Clerk of Superior Court  
Director, Administrative Office of the Courts  
Deputy Director for Administrative Services  
Administrative Office of the Courts

### **LEGISLATIVE BRANCH**

Appointees to the Joint Legislative Commission on Governmental Operations

President Pro Tempore  
Senator Marc Basnight, Co-Chair  
Senator Charles W. Albertson  
Senator Patrick J. Ballantine  
Senator Daniel G. Clodfelter  
Senator Walter H. Dalton  
Senator Charlie S. Dannelly  
Senator James Forrester  
Senator Linda Garrou  
Senator Wilbur P. Gulley  
Senator Fletcher L. Hartsell, Jr.  
Senator David W. Hoyle  
Senator Ellie Kinnaird  
Senator Jeanne H. Lucas  
Senator Stephen M. Metcalf  
Senator Anthony E. Rand  
Senator Eric M. Reeves  
Senator Robert A. Rucho  
Senator R. C. Soles, Jr.  
Senator Scott Thomas

Speaker of the House  
Representative James B. Black, Co-Chair  
Representative Richard T. Morgan, Co-Chair  
Representative Martha B. Alexander  
Representative Rex L. Baker  
Representative Bobby H. Barbee, Sr.  
Representative Harold J. Brubaker  
Representative Debbie A. Clary  
Representative E. Nelson Cole  
Representative James W. Crawford, Jr.  
Representative William T. Culpepper, III  
Representative W. Pete Cunningham  
Representative W. Robert Grady  
Representative Joe Hackney  
Representative Julia C. Howard  
Representative Joe L. Kiser  
Representative Edd Nye  
Representative William C. Owens, Jr.  
Representative Wilma M. Sherrill  
Representative Thomas E. Wright

### **Other Legislative Officials**

Mr. James D. Johnson

Director, Fiscal Research Division

April 13, 2004

## ORDERING INFORMATION

---

Copies of this report may be obtained by contacting the:

Office of the State Auditor  
State of North Carolina  
2 South Salisbury Street  
20601 Mail Service Center  
Raleigh, North Carolina 27699-0601

Internet: <http://www.ncauditor.net>

Telephone: 919/807-7500

Facsimile: 919/807-7647