

# **STATE OF NORTH CAROLINA**

**CARTERET COUNTY CLERK OF SUPERIOR COURT  
FINANCIAL RELATED AUDIT  
JULY 2013**

**OFFICE OF THE STATE AUDITOR**

**BETH A. WOOD, CPA**

**STATE AUDITOR**

**CARTERET COUNTY CLERK OF SUPERIOR COURT**

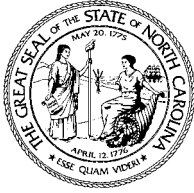
**BEAUFORT, NORTH CAROLINA**

**FINANCIAL RELATED AUDIT**

**JULY 2013**

**THE HONORABLE PAMELA A. HANSON**

**CLERK OF SUPERIOR COURT**



Beth A. Wood, CPA  
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.ncauditor.net>

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**AUDITOR'S TRANSMITTAL**

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July 22, 2013

The Honorable Pat McCrory, Governor  
The General Assembly of North Carolina  
The Honorable Pamela A. Hanson, Carteret County Clerk of Superior Court

This report presents the results of our financial related audit at the Carteret County Clerk of Superior Court. 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 performance audit standards contained in *Government Auditing Standards*, issued by the Comptroller General of the United States.

The results of our audit disclosed a deficiency in internal control and/or instance of noncompliance that is considered reportable under *Government Auditing Standards*. This finding is described in the *Audit Findings and Responses* section of this report.

*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 cursive script that reads "Beth A. Wood".

Beth A. Wood, CPA  
State Auditor

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## BACKGROUND

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As authorized by Article 5A of Chapter 147 of the *North Carolina General Statutes*, we have conducted a financial related audit at the Carteret County Clerk of Superior Court. There were no special circumstances that caused us to conduct the audit, but rather it was performed as part of our effort to periodically examine and report on the financial practices of state agencies and institutions.

The voters of each county elect a Clerk of Superior Court for a four-year term. Clerks are responsible for all clerical and record-keeping functions of the superior court and district court. The Clerks' Offices collect, invest, and distribute assets in a fiduciary capacity. For example, the Clerks' Offices collect fines and court costs, hold cash and property bonds, administer estates on behalf of minors, and distribute resources to governmental and private parties as required.

The North Carolina Administrative Office of the Courts (NCAOC) provides statewide support services for the courts, including court programs and management services; information technology; human resources services; financial, legal, and legislative support; and purchasing services. In addition, the NCAOC prepares and administers the court system's budget.

## AUDIT SCOPE AND OBJECTIVES

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The general objective of this financial related audit was to identify improvements needed in internal control over selected fiscal matters. 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. Errors or fraud may nevertheless occur and not be detected because of inherent limitations in internal control. 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. Our audit does not provide a basis for rendering an opinion on internal control, and consequently, we have not issued such an opinion.

Our audit scope covered the period July 1, 2012 through December 31, 2012. During our audit, we considered internal control related to the following accounts and objectives:

*Cash* - This classification includes cash on deposit with private bank accounts. We examined internal control designed to ensure that the Clerk properly safeguards and accounts for these assets. We also examined internal control designed to ensure compliance with laws and regulations related to depositing cash receipts and escheating unclaimed funds after a prescribed period of time. As of December 31, 2012, the Clerk had \$2,393,059.43 in cash on deposit with private banks.

*Cash Bonds* – We examined internal control designed to ensure compliance with laws and regulations governing the distribution of forfeited cash bonds. These laws and regulations require the Clerk to remit such funds to the county once a final judgment of forfeiture is entered. As of December 31, 2012, the Clerk had \$1,856,171.49 in cash bonds.

## METHODOLOGY

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To accomplish our audit objectives, we gained an understanding of internal control over matters described in the *Audit Scope and Objectives* section of this report and evaluated the design of the internal control. We then performed further audit procedures consisting of tests of control effectiveness and/or substantive procedures that provide evidence about our audit objectives. Specifically, we interviewed personnel, observed operations, reviewed policies, analyzed accounting records, and examined documentation supporting recorded transactions and balances as considered necessary in the circumstances. Whenever sampling was used, we applied a nonstatistical approach but chose sample sizes comparable to those that would have been determined statistically. As a result, we were able to project our results to the population but not quantify the sampling risk.

As a basis for evaluating internal control, we applied the internal control guidance contained in professional auditing standards. As discussed in the standards, internal control consists of five interrelated components, which are (1) control environment, (2) risk assessment, (3) control activities, (4) information and communication, and (5) monitoring.

We conducted this audit in accordance with generally accepted government auditing standards applicable to performance audits. Those standards require that we plan and perform the audit to obtain sufficient, appropriate evidence to provide a reasonable basis for our findings and conclusions based on our audit objectives. We believe that the evidence obtained provides a reasonable basis for our findings and conclusions based on our audit objectives.

## RESULTS AND CONCLUSIONS

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The results of our audit disclosed a deficiency in internal control and/or instance of noncompliance that is considered reportable under generally accepted government auditing standards. This finding is described in the *Audit Findings and Responses* section of this report. Management's response is presented after the audit finding. We did not audit the response, and accordingly, we express no opinion on the response.



## AUDIT FINDINGS AND RESPONSES

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### INADEQUATE SEGREGATION OF DUTIES

The Clerk's Office has granted staff access rights to information systems that are incompatible with adequate segregation of duties and not in compliance with the *Clerk of Superior Court Financial Policies and Procedures Manual*. As a result, errors or misappropriations could occur and not be detected in a timely manner.

During our review of the information system access, we noted the following deficiencies:

- Five employees with head bookkeeper access or cashier access in the Financial Management System (FMS) have the ability to update case information in the Automated Criminal Infraction System (ACIS) or the Civil Case Processing System (VCAP). Update capabilities to enter, change, or delete information increases the risk that criminal citations could be inappropriately waived in ACIS or judgments satisfied in VCAP, resulting in unauthorized entries or possible misappropriation of assets.
- The backup bookkeeper has been granted head bookkeeper access in FMS to perform the monthly bank reconciliations as part of their training. The bank reconciliations performed during the audit period were not reviewed timely by an independent reviewer. Head bookkeeper access permits an employee to enter payment authorizations and create and post journal entries. The ability to reconcile bank accounts without independent review increases the risk that unauthorized entries or misappropriation of assets could occur without detection. Subsequent to the audit period, the bank statements were reviewed by the Administrative Office of Courts.

In the *Clerk of Superior Court Financial Policies and Procedures Manual* guidelines are established to maintain segregation of duties. Adequate segregation of duties involves assigning responsibilities such that duties of one employee automatically provide a cross-check on the work of other employees.

*Recommendation:* The Clerk's Office should grant information systems access rights and segregate duties in accordance with guidance contained in the *Clerk of Superior Court Financial Policies and Procedures Manual* or implement alternative compensating controls.

*Agency Response:* Those clerks with update access to ACIS and/or VCAP have been changed to "inquiry only" status. Over past years as clerks have been promoted from office to office or retired, duties have been assigned but not necessarily deleted from the system. Also due to our staff size as a small to medium size department we have tried to follow "Internal Reliability" which is also found in the Clerk of Superior Court Manual by having multiple staff cross-trained as "back-up" in the event a primary clerk is absent from duty. Those identified as "back-up" cashiers are utilized randomly and only when necessary.

Recently the Head Bookkeeper retired after 30 years, and the "back-up" bookkeeper was promoted to Head Bookkeeper. Bank reconciliations were being reviewed by our regional FMS auditor from AOC. They are now reviewed by an independent employee of the Administrative Office of Courts assigned only that responsibility on a monthly basis.

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## ORDERING INFORMATION

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20601 Mail Service Center  
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For additional information contact:

Bill Holmes  
Director of External Affairs  
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