

STATE OF NORTH CAROLINA

NORTHAMPTON COUNTY CLERK OF SUPERIOR COURT FINANCIAL RELATED AUDIT

JUNE 2013

OFFICE OF THE STATE AUDITOR

BETH A. WOOD, CPA

STATE AUDITOR

NORTHAMPTON COUNTY CLERK OF SUPERIOR COURT

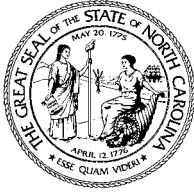
JACKSON, NORTH CAROLINA

FINANCIAL RELATED AUDIT

JUNE 2013

THE HONORABLE LAQUITTA G. COOPER

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>

AUDITOR'S TRANSMITTAL

June 5, 2013

The Honorable Pat McCrory, Governor
The General Assembly of North Carolina
The Honorable Laquitta G. Cooper, Northampton Clerk of Superior Court

This report presents the results of our financial related audit at the Northampton 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 that is considered reportable under *Government Auditing Standards*. This item 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 ways 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

As authorized by Article 5A of Chapter 147 of the *North Carolina General Statutes*, we have conducted a financial related audit at the Northampton 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

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 the inherent limitations of internal control. Also, projections of any evaluation of internal control to future periods are subject to the risk that conditions may change or that 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. As of December 31, 2012, the Clerk had \$85,200 in cash on deposit with private banks.

Trusts - This classification includes funds held by the Clerk for minors, incapacitated adults, and others according to the terms of a court order, will, or deed. We examined internal control designed to ensure that distributions from the accounts are proper, including internal control designed to ensure compliance with laws and regulations governing distributions where applicable. As of December 31, 2012, the Clerk had \$689,087 in trust accounts.

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 \$38,022 in cash bonds.

METHODOLOGY

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: (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

The results of our audit disclosed a deficiency in internal control that is considered reportable under generally accepted government auditing standards. This item 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

INAPPROPRIATE INFORMATION SYSTEMS ACCESS

The Clerk's Office has given information system access rights that are inconsistent with proper segregation of duties. Proper segregation of duties involves assigning responsibilities such that the duties of one employee automatically provide a cross-check on the work of another employee. When incompatible duties are not segregated, there is an increased risk of errors or fraud occurring without detection.

Failure to segregate duties also represents noncompliance with the *Clerk of Superior Court Financial Policies and Procedures Manual*. The manual establishes guidelines to maintain adequate segregation of duties and states that segregation of duties is important enough to be adopted whether efficiency or inefficiency is the consequence.

The Clerk has head cashier (HCASH) access in the Financial Management System (FMS) that allows her to close out receipt batches, perform voids, and review pending receipts. She also has the ability to add, update, and delete information in the Automated Criminal Infraction System (ACIS) and the Civil Case Processing System (VCAP). Update capabilities to enter, change, or delete information increases the risk that citations could be inappropriately waived in ACIS or judgments satisfied in VCAP.

We noted that other control procedures were in place that would normally mitigate the risk associated with inappropriate system access; however, the controls were performed by subordinate employees or the Clerk and thus cannot be relied upon to mitigate risk associated with the Clerk's access.

Recommendation: The Clerk should assign information system access rights and segregate duties in accordance with guidance contained in the *Clerk of Superior Court Financial Policies and Procedures Manual* or implement effective compensating controls.

Clerk's Response: I, Laquitta Green Cooper, Clerk of Superior Court have made the following changes by reducing Laquitta Green Cooper, Clerk of Superior Court's security in ACIS and VCAP to inquiry only.

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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

Telephone: 919-807-7500

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For additional information contact:

Bill Holmes
Director of External Affairs
919-807-7513

This audit required 144 audit hours at a cost of \$10,368.