

STATE OF NORTH CAROLINA

INVESTIGATIVE REPORT

NORTH CAROLINA DEPARTMENT OF CRIME CONTROL AND PUBLIC SAFETY

DIVISION OF ALCOHOL LAW ENFORCEMENT

RALEIGH, NORTH CAROLINA

JUNE 2012

OFFICE OF THE STATE AUDITOR

BETH A. WOOD, CPA

STATE AUDITOR

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Beth A. Wood, CPA State Auditor

Office of the State Auditor

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AUDITOR'S TRANSMITTAL

The Honorable Beverly Perdue, Governor Members of the North Carolina General Assembly Reuben Young, Secretary, North Carolina Department of Public Safety

Ladies and Gentlemen:

Pursuant to North Carolina General Statute §147-64.6(c)(16), we have completed our investigation of allegations pertaining to the North Carolina Department of Crime Control and Public Safety, Division of Alcohol Law Enforcement. The results of our investigation, along with recommendations for corrective action, are contained in this report.

Copies of this report have been provided to the Governor, the Attorney General and other appropriate officials in accordance with G.S. §147-64.6 (c) (12).

Respectfully submitted,

Sed A Wood

Beth A. Wood, CPA

State Auditor

June 19, 2012

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INTRODUCTION

The Office of State Auditor received an allegation through the *State Auditor's Hotline* concerning the use of state-owned vehicles assigned to the Director and Deputy Director of the Division of Alcohol Law Enforcement (ALE) within the North Carolina Department of Crime Control and Public Safety (Crime Control). Both the Director and Deputy Director worked at ALE's Raleigh headquarters yet maintained their permanent residences near Asheville, North Carolina. Allegedly, these individuals used their state-owned vehicles to travel to their homes on weekends without a valid business reason in violation of state policy.

To conduct our investigation, we performed the following procedures:

- Review of state and agency policies as well as North Carolina General Statutes related to the use of state-owned motor vehicles
- Interviews of ALE employees and Crime Control management
- Examination and analysis of available supporting documentation related to daily activities and vehicle usage

This report presents the results of our investigation. The investigation was conducted pursuant to North Carolina General Statute § 147-64.6 (c) (16).

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ORGANIZATION OVERVIEW

The Division of Alcohol Law Enforcement (ALE) is a division of the North Carolina Department of Crime Control and Public Safety. ALE's statutory authority is set out in North Carolina General Statute § 18B-500. While its agents have authority to arrest and take investigatory action for any criminal offense, their primary responsibility is the enforcement of the Alcohol Beverage Control (ABC) laws and regulations. In addition, ALE special agents conduct alcohol seller/server training and educational programs for high school and college students to heighten their awareness of the consequences of underage alcohol use.

ALE is led by a Director who is appointed by the Governor. The Director is assisted by a Deputy Director of Operations, Deputy Director of Law Enforcement Services, and a Deputy Director of Professional Standards. As of November 16, 2011, ALE had 130 employees that included 112 sworn law enforcement officers assigned to nine district offices across the State as well as its headquarters in Raleigh.

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¹ Effective January 1, 2012, the Department of Crime Control and Public Safety was part of a consolidation within state government that created a new Department of Public Safety. This new agency is organized into three divisions that encompass many law enforcement and public safety functions: Adult Correction, Juvenile Justice, and Law Enforcement. Alcohol Law Enforcement now falls under the Law Enforcement Division.

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FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

1. MANAGEMENT REPEATEDLY DENIED AUDITORS READY ACCESS TO RECORDS AND PERSONNEL.

During the course of our investigation, Department of Crime Control and Public Safety (Crime Control) officials repeatedly blocked or delayed access to records and employees. Ready access is required by North Carolina law. The subject of the investigation (who was a high-ranking member of the agency) prevented agency personnel from submitting to interviews and did not appear for an interview as scheduled while other agency officials delayed our attempts to review records. These activities hindered our ability to conduct our investigation.

According to North Carolina General Statute § 147-64.7.(a)(1), "The Auditor and his authorized representatives shall have ready access to persons and may examine and copy all books, records, reports, vouchers, correspondence, files, personnel files, investments, and any other documentation of any State agency."

Because a common element of the allegations we receive is distrust in management's willingness to address concerns involving internal operations, it is imperative that auditors/investigators have the authority to gain unrestricted access to state agency records and personnel. That access is essential to ensure that the information we obtain is impartial and unfiltered without agency officials controlling or altering it.

Initial Contact

We began our investigation by contacting the Alcohol Law Enforcement (ALE) Director to schedule an interview. Because the issues were deemed to be of a relatively minor nature and involved the Director, we believed this approach would answer most of our questions in the quickest, most discreet manner possible.

When we first contacted the Director to request a meeting, he said that he needed to inquire of his supervisor as to our authority and how he was to respond to our requests. This is a common occurrence when we initially contact an agency official at the outset of our investigations. Typically, after a follow-up call and reference to the law cited above, we are granted full access to records and personnel and our work proceeds.

Subsequent to our initial contact with the Director and prior to arranging our meeting, we received a phone call from the Chief Deputy Secretary as well as the Secretary of Crime Control. We discussed the allegations, our statutory authority, and our investigative process and reached an agreement as to our investigation proceeding.

During our initial interviews with the Director and Deputy Director, we were provided explanations and documents related to time and vehicle use. We informed the Director that we needed to verify the explanations and review the documentation he provided by obtaining additional information and talking with other agency employees. The Director indicated that we could talk to whomever we needed.

Personnel files

As part of our investigation, we needed to review the Director's and Deputy Director's personnel files. As a courtesy, we contacted the Crime Control Legal Counsel on Thursday, September 8, 2011 to inform her of the review. She indicated that she would need to obtain the Secretary's approval, that he was out of town, and he would not be available until the following week. We stated that, as previously discussed, the Secretary's approval was not needed. After apparently receiving approval from the Secretary, we were granted access to these records later that afternoon. However, the Legal Counsel remained in the office while we reviewed the records.

Attempt to interview field personnel

Next, we attempted to interview ALE agents in local field offices to clarify and corroborate information that we had received. Because the subjects of our investigation directly supervised the employees we planned to interview, we wanted to limit the possibility that the purpose of our interviews would be discussed prior to our arrival. To achieve that goal, we met on September 23, 2011 with the Chief Deputy Secretary who is the immediate supervisor of the ALE Director.

During our meeting with the Chief Deputy Secretary, we discussed some of the issues discovered in our investigation and the need to interview some field office employees. We informed him that we were planning to conduct these interviews in the near future and that we were aware that, when we contacted the employees, they would seek approval from management prior to agreeing to meet with us. We informed the Chief Deputy Secretary that we did not want these employees to contact the Director or Deputy Director for that approval but preferred the employees contact him instead. During that meeting, the Chief Deputy Secretary said that he understood that need, would comply with our request, and that we would get full cooperation.

On Tuesday, September 27, 2011, we called the Special Agent in Charge of the Asheville ALE office. The Special Agent made himself readily available and we scheduled a meeting for the following afternoon. We informed him that, if he needed clarification of the reason for our meeting or approval, he should contact the Chief Deputy Secretary for that information.

Within a couple of hours, the Chief Deputy Secretary called the Office of the State Auditor (OSA) and indicated that he believed that we would contact him first, that he would arrange our interviews with the field employees, and that the interviews would be conducted in Raleigh. We clarified what we discussed in the September 23 meeting and confirmed our intention to meet with the agent in Asheville the next day as planned. The Chief Deputy Secretary said that he needed to speak with the Secretary.

The next day, while OSA investigators travelled to the western part of the State, a number of discussions took place between the Secretary and the OSA Director of Special Investigations. During those conversations, our statutory authority was again affirmed. In addition, the standard investigative procedures and the need to bypass the Director for

FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS (CONTINUED)

approval were discussed in detail. We clearly informed the Secretary of our intention to conduct the interview with the Special Agent in Charge of the Asheville ALE office later that day as scheduled and with other agents in the coming days in other nearby districts.

We arrived at the Asheville ALE office as scheduled that afternoon. When we met the Special Agent in Charge, he apologized for our long trip and informed us that he was instructed to not speak with us. He said that he was told this by "management" and that it "came from the Secretary." The agent later clarified that he had called the Director rather than the Chief Deputy Secretary as we had instructed him and the Director told him to wait until he received approval from the Secretary.

When we asked the Director about the Special Agent's comment, the Director said that he had received a call from the Special Agent either when we arrived at the Asheville office "unannounced" or when we first called the Special Agent. The Director confirmed that he instructed the Special Agent not to speak with us until "he found out what was going on." The Director said that he then contacted the Secretary. However, we did not arrive unannounced at the Asheville office. To the contrary, we arranged the meeting the previous day and we were contacted by the Chief Deputy Secretary shortly after we made the appointment the previous day.

Crime Control management later characterized these events as a "misunderstanding." The Secretary said that "the Director told folks out west, 'you don't talk to anyone unless approved by the Secretary'." The Secretary said that he would have told anyone that contacted him to cooperate fully with our investigation. However, even after conversations that morning related to our authority and intention to meet with the field agents, we were denied access to speak to the Special Agent.

Subsequent to our being denied access to interview the Special Agent, the OSA General Counsel consulted with the Attorney General's Office and prepared subpoenas with the intention to return to Asheville to serve them. However, we were given "approval" by Crime Control officials to interview the Special Agent as well as other individuals in the district offices without having to serve subpoenas.

Complaint submitted against OSA Investigators

Following our initial interviews of field personnel, the Director and Deputy Director submitted letters to OSA as a formal complaint against the lead investigator "for his incompetence; failure to fully inform me of the allegations of the anonymous complaint; untruthfulness, failure to be completely forthcoming, and misleading statements; and his unlawfully detaining me."

Along with the formal complaint was a lengthy request for personnel records of the investigators assigned to the case that included employment history, vehicle use, travel expenses, and salary information. This complaint and records request appeared to be submitted as an attempt to threaten or distract OSA investigators from carrying out their duties.

Follow-up interviews with Director and Deputy Director

After reviewing documentation and interviewing other employees, we attempted to schedule follow-up interviews with the Director and Deputy Director to discuss and clarify information we obtained subsequent to our initial meeting. We contacted the Director's administrative assistant to schedule the meetings and agreed on an available day and time (November 1, 2011 at 10:00am and 10:30am, respectively). We indicated that these interviews were going to take place at the OSA office. The assistant responded that both the Director and Deputy Director stated that the meetings would take place at their office. We reiterated that the meetings would take place in the OSA office at the date and time agreed upon.

The day before the scheduled meetings, we sent an email re-confirming the place and time of the interviews with directions to the OSA office and indicating that, if there were any questions, please contact us. We did not receive any reply.

However, the Director and Deputy Director failed to arrive for the interviews. After multiple communications between OSA, the Attorney General's Office, and Crime Control, we were told that the Director and Deputy Director thought the meeting was scheduled for the afternoon. In a subsequent meeting, the Secretary alluded to a possible "doctor's appointment" as a conflict that resulted in the individuals not keeping the appointment. The interviews were re-scheduled and subsequently held a few days later in the OSA office.

A predominant theme in the allegations we receive is a basic distrust in the openness of agency management to provide full disclosure of issues and respond accordingly to fraud, waste, and abuse allegations. The actions of Crime Control management during this investigation served to underscore that perception. The statutory authority granting OSA full and ready access to records and personnel is critical in obtaining accurate, unfiltered information to allow investigators to arrive at a complete and accurate conclusion. However, Crime Control management repeatedly tried to prevent, deter, delay, and control access to that critical information.

According to North Carolina General Statute § 147-64.7.A, "Any person who shall willfully make or cause to be made to the State Auditor or his designated representatives any false, misleading, or unfounded report for the purpose of interfering with the performance of any audit, special review, or investigation, or to hinder or obstruct the State Auditor or the State Auditor's designated representatives in the performance of their duties (emphasis added), shall be guilty of a Class 2 misdemeanor."

RECOMMENDATION

Crime Control management should comply with General Statutes by providing OSA ready access to persons and records. Management should stress to all employees the importance of full cooperation with any and all audits and investigations.

2. ALE DID NOT MAINTAIN ADEQUATE DOCUMENTATION TO SUPPORT THE BUSINESS PURPOSE FOR STATE VEHICLE USAGE.

The Director and Deputy Director of ALE did not provide adequate documentation to support claims that their state-owned vehicles were only used for legitimate business purposes. As a result, they did not prove that their state-owned vehicles were not used for commuting from their assigned offices in Raleigh to their permanent residences near Asheville.

Secretary Restricts Commuting to Legitimate Business Purposes

Interviews with the Director, Deputy Director, the Crime Control Secretary, and Chief Deputy Secretary confirmed that, unless there was a "legitimate" business purpose, the Director and Deputy Director were not allowed to drive their state-owned vehicles to their homes in the Asheville area on weekends. The Secretary emphasized the importance of any use of a state vehicle only being for a legitimate reason by saying, "we don't want folks making up a purpose and then driving home." The Director and Deputy Director both acknowledged understanding that taking their vehicle home on weekends should be "incidental" to a legitimate business purpose and they must not create a business reason to justify using their state-owned vehicle.

The assigned duty station² for both positions was the Raleigh ALE headquarters. ALE policy requires that agents must establish residency within their "district." With extenuating circumstances approval can be granted to live outside the "district" but within a 40-mile radius of the district office or their respective field office. Both men shared an apartment in the Raleigh area and returned to their permanent residence in the Asheville area on weekends. As law enforcement officers, both the Director and Deputy Director were allowed to use their state-owned vehicles to commute between their place of work and their residence. However, for purposes of their employment, their primary residence for reasonable commuting in their state-owned vehicles was their local apartment.

Limited Documentation Provided to Auditors

Both the Director and Deputy Director provided limited documentation to support the business use of their vehicles. Our analysis of those documents raised questions related to their vehicle use.

Director

To support the use of his assigned state-owned vehicle, the Director initially furnished his monthly time sheets. However, these forms simply listed the number of hours that the Director worked each day. During our interviews, the Director repeatedly said that he did not want to have "any question" raised about the use of his vehicle. The Director told us

² Crime Control Public Safety Travel Policies and Regulations define "Duty Station" as the headquarters or job location at which the employee spends the majority of his or her working hours. [North Carolina General Statute § 138-6(a)(1)]

FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS (CONTINUED)

that he wanted to maintain more detailed time records but was required by the Chief Deputy Secretary to complete a less detailed version.

The time sheets also included the total miles driven each month by the Director. These amounts showed that, between January 2010 and September 2011, the Director drove an average of 982 miles per month. The Director said that, based on the low number of miles, it was not reasonable to conclude that he was using his state vehicle to commute to his home on weekends.³

However, we reviewed purchases made with his state-issued gas purchase card and determined that the Director's card was used primarily in the Raleigh area (58%) or the western part of the State (35%). The Raleigh area purchases were sporadic, sometimes only once in a two-to-three week period.

The Director said that, during the early part of 2010, he spent extra time at his home (with the approval of the Crime Control Secretary) due to a family issue that concluded at the end of April. However, subsequent to that time, 11 of 19 gas purchases were made in the western part of North Carolina.

When we asked the Director if he had any other documentation that would help support the business use of his assigned state-owned vehicle, he provided us with a calendar of his daily activities. The calendar appeared to support some but not all trips to the Asheville area. The Director was unable to provide any additional information or documentation.

Deputy Director

To support his use of a state-owned vehicle, the Deputy Director provided a detailed activity log. The Deputy Director indicated that he kept "more detailed, accurate records than most agents." In addition, the Director described the Deputy Director as a "meticulous record-keeper." When the Deputy Director provided the records, he indicated that the logs would show a number of times that his vehicle was at his Asheville home on a weekend but those times were "infrequent" and incidental to a specific business purpose.

We analyzed the Deputy Director's activity log along with purchases made with his state-issued gas purchase card. In addition, we interviewed agents located in ALE field offices to attempt to corroborate the frequency and purpose of visits. According to field agents we interviewed, the Deputy Director stopped by the ALE offices in Greensboro, Hickory, and Asheville (usually on a Thursday or Friday afternoon) to drop off equipment and paperwork and briefly visit. These visits were not scheduled and did not have a designated purpose; instead, the meetings were merely to talk about things in a general nature. Conversely, the activity logs indicated that the Deputy Director typically only visited the other district offices throughout the State for scheduled meetings or if invited for a specific purpose.

³ Weaverville is approximately 260 miles from Raleigh.

FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS (CONCLUDED)

After completing our analysis of the documents the Deputy Director provided as support for his vehicle use, we discussed our concerns with him. The Deputy Director said that there were personnel issues related to these districts for a period of time and, as a result, "I probably went through there on my way home every Friday in my personal car or a state car." The Deputy Director added, "Unequivocally, if I was in my state car, I was on state business without a doubt." The Deputy Director also said that the personnel issues spanned from early 2010 to mid-2010; however, our review extended through August 2011. The Deputy Director admitted that he did not visit the other districts as often as the western districts because "I am not going east every Friday."

In addition, we determined that, on nine weekends, the Deputy Director's gas purchase card was used near his Asheville home while no business purpose was shown on his activity log. When shown a weekend that indicated a day off but his gas purchase card being used, the Deputy Director said that "just because it shows a day off, it doesn't tell me where the car is. I can't tell you where the car is. I don't know...but, if I had my state car, I reiterate, I had a reason for state business."

The Deputy Director said that "there are times I have been on state business or I drove my car home *anticipating* [emphasis added] that I might need blue lights and siren to respond to something and I haven't documented it. I have since started documenting it." We asked the Deputy Director if there was any documentation that would indicate where his state car was at any given time and how it was being used and he replied, "Not to the best of my knowledge."

Weekend Commuting Using State-owned Vehicle Appears Abusive

The allegations that we received implied that the Director and Deputy Director were abusing their privilege of using their assigned state-owned vehicles. Both chose to maintain their primary residence in the western part of the State and return there on weekends. Both were clearly instructed (and agree they understood) that, unless they had state business in the area, they should not drive their vehicle home on weekends.

The Director and Deputy Director, as well as Crime Control management, emphasized that driving between Asheville and Raleigh could be perceived as an abuse and that care should be taken to avoid that perception. The lack of any documentation supporting a legitimate business use suggests that not all vehicle use was in accordance with management directives. Because of the lack of available detailed documentation, the Director and Deputy Director did not support their contention that their assigned state-owned vehicles were always used for a business purpose.

RECOMMENDATION

Management should ensure that its documentation clearly supports a business purpose for state-owned vehicles. Management should consider the use of vehicle mileage/activity logs or other methods to document the use of state vehicles. Management should also consider taking appropriate disciplinary action against the Director and Deputy Director.

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STATE AUDITOR'S NOTE TO THE DEPARTMENT'S RESPONSE

The Department of Public Safety's (Department) response attempts to characterize its failure to provide access to persons and records as simply "seek(ing) clarification" of the State Auditor's statutory authority. The fact that the Secretary had direct involvement with other Office of the State Auditor investigations during his three years as secretary and previous six years as the chief legal counsel to former Governor Easley makes it unlikely that he was unfamiliar with the authority of the State Auditor.

Nevertheless, as the report notes, we are routinely questioned regarding our authority and expect such questions. However, the denial of access in this investigation went far beyond reasonable expectations. The following examples illustrate unusual and inappropriate obstacles to our investigation:

- Failure of the Director and Deputy Director to appear for scheduled interviews on November 1, 2011 after repeated e-mails and phone calls confirmed the date and time
- Management's refusal to allow field office employees to meet with us on September 28, 2011 after we confirmed with the Chief Deputy Secretary on September 23, 2011 and with the Secretary in multiple discussions the day before and day of the attempted interviews
- The Department's Legal Counsel's insistence on observing our review of personnel files
- The Director's "public records request" regarding the personnel records, vehicle use, and travel expenses of the investigators assigned to the case
- Multiple and repeated conversations between Department management and Office of the State Auditor management that eventually necessitated the involvement of the Governor's Office and the Attorney General's Office as well as the preparation of subpoenas

It is blatantly false that the investigator refused to provide the State Auditor's statutory authority; rather, the investigator provided a copy of the applicable North Carolina General Statutes which outline our authority. Further, the response erroneously claims that it was the responsibility of the investigator to advise the Director and Deputy Director of their constitutional rights, specifically, those under *Garrity v. New Jersey*, 385 U.S. 493 (1967). Garrity protects public employees from being compelled to incriminate themselves during interviews conducted by their employers. Garrity does not require investigators in North Carolina to advise public employees of those rights.

The Department claims it is "troubling" that the report concluded that the Director and Deputy Director were unable to document a business use of their assigned vehicles. As stewards of public resources, management has a responsibility to account for and ensure the proper use of state funds and state equipment. As such, the Department had a responsibility to the taxpayers to document that state equipment was always used for a legitimate business purpose. The Director's and Deputy Director's failure to adequately document a business purpose for trips to the Asheville area, where their permanent residences are located, tarnishes their own as well as the Department's credibility.

STATE AUDITOR'S NOTE TO THE DEPARTMENT'S RESPONSE (CONCLUDED)

Finally, the Department did not acknowledge the issues involved nor indicate any intention to implement our recommendations or make changes to its current procedures. The Department should strengthen its accountability to the taxpayers by properly documenting the business use of state vehicles.



Beverly Eaves Perdue, Governor

Reuben F. Young, Secretary

June 5, 2012

Ms. Beth A. Wood, CPA
Office of the State Auditor
2 S. Salisbury Street
20601 Mail Service Center
Raleigh, North Carolina 27699-0601

Dear Ms. Wood:

The Department of Public Safety is in receipt of the draft report of your investigation into allegations received through the *State Auditor's Hotline* concerning the use of state-owned vehicles assigned to the Director and Deputy Director (of Operations) of the Division of Alcohol Law Enforcement (ALE). This document serves as our response.

We regret that you regarded efforts by the department to seek clarification of your authority as attempts to impede your investigation. Requests by legal counsel and department management that your investigator refer them to the specific statutory provisions upon which he relied in asserting his authority were met with resistance, indignation and, at times, outright refusal. These responses were particularly unhelpful when the agency was asked to allow your investigator access to confidential personnel records, the unlawful disclosure of which carries criminal penalties. Given the severity of the sanctions for erroneously releasing confidential personnel information, the department acted judiciously in confirming your authority to access such information prior to releasing it.

Moreover, the department has the responsibility to preserve and protect the constitutional and statutory rights of its employees. As an agency with law enforcement personnel, we are particularly sensitive to that responsibility. During the initial interview of the Director, your investigator characterized the inquiry as an "internal investigation," which triggered certain constitutional rights, namely those under *Garrity v. New Jersey*, 385 U.S. 493 (1967). When the Director, a seasoned law enforcement officer and experienced investigator, was not advised of those rights, he became concerned that those rights were not being protected. The same concerns were raised during the questioning of the Deputy Director. During the course of the investigation, it became increasingly clear that the inquiry was more focused on the employees than the processes; therefore, the department thought it prudent to respond cautiously to all requests from your office. The department maintains that in every instance, once the authority of your office was verified and the department was satisfied that the rights of its employees

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were safeguarded, you were provided ready access to persons and records, as required under the North Carolina General Statutes.

With regard to the allegations, your report concludes that the Director and Deputy Director "did not prove that their state-owned vehicles were not used for commuting from their assigned offices in Raleigh to their permanent residences near Asheville." This conclusion is troubling, in that it was not the employees' responsibility to disprove the allegations made through your hotline, but rather the responsibility of your office to substantiate the allegations. Furthermore, given that your investigation failed to substantiate any violation by our employees of state law or policy with regard to the use of state-owned vehicles, your recommendation that we consider taking appropriate disciplinary action against the Director and Deputy Director is manifestly inappropriate.

Thank you for the opportunity to respond to the report. Should you have questions, please feel free to contact me.

Sincerely,

Reuben F. Young

Secretary

RFY/cgw

ORDERING INFORMATION

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