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AUDIT OF OFFICE OF CRIME PREVENTION FEBRUARY 24, 2026

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AUDIT AUTHORIZATION

An audit of the Office of Crime Prevention was requested and authorized by City Council on September 16, 2025.

MISSION/VISION/VALUES

The Office of Crime Prevention is committed to enhancing the lives of the residents of Muscogee County through grant-funded programming provided by non-profit organizations and agencies throughout the county. With a focus on community crime prevention, the Office strives to create a healthier community and enhance life for all our citizens. The department operates through collaboration, education, citizen programming and advocacy to preserve safe environments and communities for the citizens of Columbus. It's hoped that Columbus, as a safe and crime-free city, would set an example for other cities. The success of the Office of Crime Prevention is fueled by citizen support and integration. Crime Prevention focuses on 5 key components- Recreation, Education, Drug & Alcohol Intervention, Employment and Community Policing. Many supported initiatives have been launched at the grass-roots level. The Office of Crime Prevention works closely with the 7-member Crime Prevention Board. The Board carefully evaluates annual funding applications for funding, and awards funding each year, applying consistent actions & vision. Board members are thorough in their evaluations, distributing funds to established, institutional programs as well as newly launched grass-roots programs.

The Crime Prevention Board is led by Chairman Danny Arencibia and includes Erika N. Cottingham, Sgt. Angela Florence, Dr. Michael Forte', Richard J. Kelly, Ralph King and Rocky R. Marsh.

AUDIT SCOPE

The scope of the audit included a brief budget review, as the department currently has one employee, our Director. The scope was focused on our funded non-profit organizations, with a review of each application record, You Tube presentations, and a review of related IRS Form

990 filings, confirming program compliance. Field visits also provided insight into community impact.

GENERAL AUDIT PROCESS

The audit process began on October 8, 2025, with the Internal Audit Team reviewing online program material, along with an initial office site visit with Internal Auditor Donna McGinnis and Director Seth Brown. During the initial office visit, we addressed access to the application portal, review of Form 990s, programming growth over the years as well as challenges in the process and hopes for future growth. Fieldwork began on October 8, 2025, and concluded on February 4, 2026.

On November 26, 2025, Internal Auditor Donna McGinnis interviewed Crime Prevention Board Chairman Danny Arencibia, discussing his experience with the programming, challenges encountered, accomplishments achieved and hopes for future program development.

On December 5, 2025, Forensic Auditors Jonathan Smith, Benjamin Meadow and Grant Conaway were in the Crime Prevention Office confirming paper program file records with Director Brown.

On December 9, 2025, Internal Auditor Donna McGinnis interviewed Crime Prevention Board Member Dr. Rocky Marsh. During the interview we focused on programming and its related challenges as well as opportunities to broaden the impact of programming.

On December 31, 2025, Internal Audit received the Department's Strategic Plan for our review, which led to additional SWOT focused discussion in the Internal Auditor's Office with Director Brown on January 2, 2026.

On January 6, 2026, Director Brown shared a list of recommended sites for field auditor visits so that we could witness program dollars in action. The recommended programs were: Overflo, A Second Chance W O R K S, Columbus Technical College and Voices of the Valley Children's Chorus (VOV). Each Internal Audit team member visited a site. Observations from each visit are summarized below:

Voices of the Valley Children's Chorus (VOV)

On January 12, 2026, Internal Auditor Donna McGinnis visited with Dr. Michelle Folta of Columbus State University's Schwob School of Music. Dr. Folta directs the Chorus. The Chorus is established as a 501 C (3) non-profit organization that provides the children of the

Chattahoochee Valley with excellent choral training and performance opportunities. The organization has an active Board of Directors, and our Internal Auditor had an opportunity to meet Board Director Sally Baker.

Our Internal Auditor has viewed several taped performances but also visited rehearsal that day at the CSU Downtown Campus at 900 Broadway. It was a wonderful opportunity to visit with participating children, reading choral sheet music with them for a few hours. This program is certainly making an impact and growing with the development of a South Campus. Our Internal Auditor agrees with Dr. Folta that VOV promotes community engagement and developing musicians are learning accountability while becoming life-learners of music. Our Internal Auditor grew up in Chorus, Band & Orchestra activities so it was a real delight to share a rehearsal with the young participants. Over the years, Voices of the Valley have performed across the community and the state, as well as a performance at the American Choral Directors Southern Division Conference in 2022 in Raleigh, North Carolina. They have also traveled internationally, traveling to England in 2018, and to Italy in 2024 where they performed at St. Peter's Basilica in Vatican City. This year, VOV is looking forward to a performance at Carnegie Hall in New York City.

Columbus Technical College

On January 14, 2026, Forensic Auditor Jonathan Smith visited with Mr. James Loyd at the Columbus Tech Transport Blvd. location for a meeting relating to crime prevention grants that Columbus Tech receives. Columbus Tech works with inmates in different trade fields (HVAC, welding, plumbing, electrical) to teach them skills and get them real world certifications that they can then use to get jobs once released from prison.

Mr. Loyd showed Forensic Auditor Smith around the building, which included different classrooms that they use for the learning sections, and then led the tour to the area where the prisoners completed hands-on jobs. It was evident that Mr. Loyd as well as the instructors of these courses love what they do, and it was evident that the inmates respect and listen to the instructors as these certifications will help them once released. Forensic Auditor Smith, along with Mr. Loyd believes that this program is a vital part of crime prevention as having a stable job/employment helps reduce re-conviction among ex-prisoners. During further discussion with Mr. Loyd, it was made clear that he would love to to keep track, maintaining statistics relating to graduates of their program compared with re-conviction rates, but it is very difficult to track people once they leave the prison system. Our Forensic Auditor asked Mr. Loyd if there was anything that would additionally benefit their program and it's operation, and he cited a need for assistance with statistical tracking. It is difficult to work with the U.S. Department of Labor to get some of these statistics. While

Forensic Auditor Smith's visit was a few hours, he saw the potential that these courses have in preventing crime through reducing re-conviction rates.

Overflo

On January 23, 2026, Forensic Auditor Benjamin Meadow arrived on-site and was warmly greeted by Ms. Catasha Riley, who introduced him to several members of the program's board, along with multiple at-risk youths. She shared that the young members attend weekly workshops which are hosted every Saturday. Any of the children are welcome to spend time at the salon after school and are provided with transportation if needed. Our Forensic Auditor was walked through a sound physical application process, sharing evidence and photos of their outreach wherein they frequent schools in districts in "rough areas" with elevated crime. Throughout the salon there were rooms featuring crafts completed by the youth. Five children were observed working through tasks upon finishing their homework. Some children assisted with shop chores such as sweeping up and throwing out hair, while others worked through personal projects of their choice. One young gentleman displayed furniture for the Forensic Auditor, as he was in the process of sanding and finishing the furniture. It's the opinion of Forensic Auditor Meadow that time spent in the program seems engaging and productive for the youth. It is effective in providing a safe alternative to hanging around potentially dangerous neighborhoods while being surrounded by positive influences. There are some space constraints that may lead the board to consider relocating their headquarters, if possible, to provide additional space to accommodate more youth after school.

A Second Chance W.O.R.K.S

Forensic Auditor Grant Conaway met with the head of the program, Dr. Charles Flowers, on February 2, 2026, to better understand how funds are being used and how the program operates. The program is designed to provide students with an opportunity to take accountability for their actions and work toward redemption, and its home-like setting helps create a safe, welcoming environment for both students and parents. Parents are required to participate in seminars and meetings alongside their children, reinforcing the lessons at home and ensuring accountability.

The organization also offers mentorship for youth who may need distance from unhealthy home environments, further supporting their overall well-being.

Following the initial visit, on February 4, 2026, Grant attended several school-based sessions and met with multiple staff members, all of whom were compassionate and clearly committed to their roles. I observed sessions with both girls and boys, where presenters used discussions, scenarios, and visual aids to reinforce key messages and build strong relationships with students.

Grant also attended a one-on-one parent session involving a child who had received disciplinary action. Through guided exercises, the presenter helped the student understand the impact of his behavior on others, resulting in noticeable reflection and growth. Overall, everything he observed appeared intentional, thoughtful, and genuinely focused on the betterment of youth within the school system.

AUDIT FINDINGS

- It was learned that the Crime Prevention Director actively manages liability re: community program funding by distributing funds to awarded organizations monthly throughout the year. If necessary, there is the ability to suspend distribution.
- Additionally, the Director is active across the community in Risk Management and organizes neighborhood meetings that involve collaboration with law enforcement, special enforcement and Inspections & Codes officials, coordinates teams re: developing areas of concern such as Bay Ave. and is exploring a potential partnership with the Sports Council.
- Program funding is provided to both institutional non-profit organizations as well as smaller “grassroots” organizations.
- There is a deliberate effort made by the Director and the Board to reduce the level of awarded funding to an organization after several years of funding, to inspire and support the development of new additional “grass roots” programming initiatives.
- Both the Board members and the Crime Prevention Director encounter a great deal of community pressure and scrutiny re: award decisions that are made annually. Unlike other CCG spending decisions, these dollars have become quite politicized. Decisions are criticized because a friend may have received too little or too much.
- The Crime Prevention website has developed over time, and currently includes You Tube presentations from recipient organizations as well as a link to recent application materials.
- The program funding supports several silos of community care- programming for at-risk youth in athletics or music, prison to workforce tech or GED oriented training,

assistance for families in need, and programming to support recovery for the victims of domestic violence.

- The Crime Prevention Program has not previously successfully developed access to crime statistics, or related impact statistics. Such access can involve hurdles re: the disclosure of relevant data.
- The Crime Prevention Director also provides assistance and tutoring to young “grass roots” organization, seeking to position them for success when reviewed and evaluated by the Crime Prevention Board.

AUDIT RECOMMENDATIONS

- As programming messaging is challenged, a re-design of the department's website is recommended. It's suggested that the website spotlight the silos of community care, with recent recipients identified by silo. YouTube presentations are still meaningful, along with access to recently filed, reviewed and awarded application support.
- It is recommended that program criteria be revised to provide one level of potential annual funding opportunity for larger, developed, institutional programs with a lower tier of proposed annual funding for young “grass roots” organizations.
- It's recommended that the Crime Prevention Director work in collaboration with the Columbus Police Department on the development and distribution of a quarterly Flash Impact Statistical Report, with an initial release on June 30, 2026. The released reports should be posted on the departmental website, addressing any transparency concerns that the community may have. Data sources will need to be developed as there are some known challenges re: the public release of some data. As an example, local school districts may need parental waivers. Data would ideally be compiled at the zip code level, with age-based demographic categories.
- It's recommended that an Administrative Assistant be added to the FY27 Budget as the Crime Prevention Program has grown dramatically in recent years, with a 400% increase in program funding and a 600% increase in applicants.

Auditee Response

Director McGinnis,

I recently reviewed the report and want to express my appreciation for the hard work you and your team dedicated to it. We plan to implement the recommendations over the course of this year. Moreover, I propose that we repeat this process in the future to monitor our progress. I firmly believe that regular audits are essential for our growth and future projects.

Thank you once again.

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