



Columbus Consolidated Government

Georgia's First Consolidated Government

Post Office Box 1340
Columbus, Georgia 31902-1340

Donna L. McGinnis, CPA, CFE
Internal Auditor / Compliance Officer

**Internal Audit of the
Office of the Solicitor General**

706 225-3119
FAX: 706 225-4447
Mcginnis.Donna@columbusga.org

AUDIT AUTHORIZATION

This transitional departmental audit was authorized by City Council on January 7, 2025, in response to a request for audit by newly elected Solicitor General Shevon S. Thomas. The audit began on January 16, 2025, with the audit completed by Internal Auditor Donna McGinnis and Forensic Auditors Jonathan Smith, Benjamin Meadow and Grant Conaway.

BACKGROUND

The Office of the Solicitor General is committed to conducting a thorough, fair, vigorous and just prosecution of all criminal misdemeanor cases bound over from Records and Municipal Courts in Muscogee County. In pursuit of this mission, they accurately compile cases in a timely manner, investigate all cases, and vigorously prosecute all valid misdemeanor cases under their jurisdiction.

LEADERSHIP

Solicitor General Shevon S. Thomas leads the team, accompanied by Director of Operations & Executive Assistant Rhonda Dial, Deputy Chief Solicitor General Altovise Filmore and Deputy Chief Solicitor General Cecelia Hailes. The team is also supported by Senior Assistant Solicitor Generals Edwin Albright, Matthew Brown, Bianca Goodman and Moieh Konan. Additionally, the team is supported by Investigators Sarah Bohannon, Celeste Cacia, Chelsea Dobbs, Mariaelena Fleming-Pizarro and Terri Masciovecchio. The team also includes Deputy Clerks Katrina Wolff, Kristy Rustin and Nilsa Dejesus-Perez. The Victim Witness Services team includes Charlene Thompson & Toya Winder.

AUDIT SCOPE

The audit scope is intended to address all material aspects of the Office of the Solicitor General. Material aspects included, but were not limited to: organizational structure, policies and procedures, internal controls, cash handling process, strategic planning, payroll, equipment, and budgetary control.

AUDIT PROCESS

The Audit Process began with the authorization of the audit. An audit program was developed to address the material aspects of the departmental audit, followed by the entrance conference with the Solicitor General, the Chief of Staff & Executive Assistant Rhonda Dial and Deputy Chief Solicitor General Altovise Filmore. During the meeting, attendees were presented with the preliminary audit program items and invited to suggest any additional areas that warranted inspection. The audit techniques included physical verification of employees and capital assets, tests of internal controls, interviews, meeting observations, and other techniques as appropriate. During the audit, management was briefed on findings and potential recommendations. Following the audit, a draft report is presented to department management for review and response. A final report including the departmental response is then prepared and distributed to department management, the Mayor and Council, concurrently. A presentation to Council is scheduled to address any questions or concerns they may have and to avail it to the public. The auditor provides follow-up later to ensure that agreed-to recommendations have been implemented and are properly implemented.

FIELDWORK ACTIVITIES

Fieldwork included payroll testing re: the payroll distributions of December 13, 2024, December 27, 2024 and January 10, 2025 with confirmation against time records and payroll system reporting and no discrepancies were noted. Seven years of budgetary performance were reviewed, and the office had managed their budget well, with very little change in budgets from year to year. In the review of budgetary performance, we additionally reviewed the increased volume of misdemeanor activity in recent years.

Prior to team interviews with employees, we'd toured the work areas on the 5th and 9th Floor of the Government Center, and we'd distributed a survey to teammates soliciting their anonymous input re: work challenges, satisfaction and suggestions for improvements. Team interviews were then conducted, giving everyone on the team a chance to contribute to the auditing process.

As the previous office administration functions were performed solely by a recently retired team member, we also spent time with the Chief of Staff reviewing the transitioned status of payroll processing, office administration, and purchasing card management and controls.

Observations from the field activities include:

In our review of the most recent seven years of budgeting and budget performance, it was clear that the budget request had just been rolled forward annually, with a few exceptions such as CCG cost of living adjustments. A few employees are grant funded, with future funding uncertain. We'd found that the team had a very limited work area on the 5th and 9th floors of the Government Center, that didn't allow for an increased staffing response to the increasing volume of misdemeanors. Our volume is fueled by our Tri-City activity, which includes Phenix City, AL and the Fort Benning military base. We studied volume statistics for comparable Georgia cities, and by comparison, our Solicitor General's office has historically been doing much more with less.

The employee surveys largely provided a consensus of concern-while employees have stayed loyal to the team, they are weary of being short-staffed, in inadequate office space with antiquated office furnishings. They haven't had continuing education opportunities in recent years, and most haven't seen compensation increases or promotional opportunities in years. There are also requests for upgraded software options, and requests for cell phones for use in victim outreach.

Historically, there had been very little cross-training within the team. Prior to the election of Solicitor General Shevon S. Thomas, all office business administration tasks were consolidated on one desk. This now former employee abruptly retired once our newly elected Solicitor General was sworn in. No meaningful records had been left behind. The Chief of Staff is doing a very laudable job -taking all necessary Advantage courses, and getting a firm hand on payroll processing, ordering of necessary supplies and materials, identifying continuing education opportunities and requirements, and managing the use of the purchasing card for the office. There is also a plan in place to actively cross-train on all activities and record maintenance functions.

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Would recommend securing additional necessary office space prior to the opening of the new Judge John D. Allen Judicial Center. Allocated square footage in the new center should be confirmed but meanwhile, particularly in the Victim & Witness area, it would be beneficial to consider remote office space sharing in other CCG properties across the community as our victims and witnesses are living in all the districts in the community.
2. Would recommend including additional staff positions in the FY26 budget to correctly address the volume of misdemeanor activity. More appropriate staffing in GA sister cities could serve as a guide. The ongoing staffing plan should consider promotional step opportunities for veteran teammates who have been loyal for years, in a difficult situation.
3. Would recommend the development of Pre-Trial Diversion programming, as well as Accountability Courts.
4. Would recommend funding for continuing education for current and future teammates, as many need continuing education hours annually in order to maintain earned credentials. As the team grows, new teammates may also need some training support as they seek credentialing for the first time.
5. Would recommend the scrapping of office furnishings and assets that are in compromised condition, as at a minimum, it's a risk management issue inviting worker's compensation events. Once salvaged, replacement furnishings will need to be purchased.
6. Would recommend a re-evaluation of software for the team and would recommend provision of cell phones to the teammates interacting directly with victims and witnesses.