



**Office of the Washington State Auditor**  
**Pat McCarthy**

**Whistleblower Investigation Report**  
**Department of Social and Health  
Services**

**Published March 21, 2019**

**Report No. 1023470**





**Office of the Washington State Auditor**  
**Pat McCarthy**

March 21, 2019

Cheryl Strange, Secretary  
Department of Social and Health Services

**Report on Whistleblower Investigation**

Attached is the official report on Whistleblower Case No. 19-010 at the Department of Social and Health Services.

The State Auditor's Office received an assertion of improper governmental activity at the Department. This assertion was submitted to us under the provisions of Chapter 42.40 of the Revised Code of Washington, the Whistleblower Act. We have investigated the assertion independently and objectively through interviews and by reviewing relevant documents. This report contains the result of our investigation.

If you are a member of the media and have questions about this report, please contact Director of Communications Kathleen Cooper at (360) 902-0470. Otherwise, please contact Assistant Director of State Audit Troy Niemeyer at (360) 725-5363.

Sincerely,

Pat McCarthy  
State Auditor  
Olympia, WA

cc: Governor Jay Inslee  
Andrew Colvin, Discovery & Ethics Administrator  
Kate Reynolds, Executive Director, Executive Ethics Board  
Cheri Elliott, Investigator

# WHISTLEBLOWER INVESTIGATION REPORT

## Assertion and Results

Our Office received a complaint asserting an employee (subject) at the Department of Social and Health Services (Department) failed to fully staff trained emergency medical technicians (EMTs) at the Special Commitment Center (Center). Additionally, the complaint asserted the subject did not ensure all EMTs received the proper training to keep them current in their certifications.

We found no reasonable cause to believe an improper governmental action occurred.

## Background

In a previous investigation,<sup>1</sup> our Office addressed the issue of understaffing of EMTs. At that time, the Department was awaiting additional funding to rectify the situation. In late October 2018, we met with Center management regarding the current investigation and included in our conversation a discussion about the previous investigation. The Center acknowledged the staffing issue, but said that it had rectified the situation as of the first of that month, finally obtaining the necessary funds and employees to fully staff EMTs in the Center's fire station. Because investigating that issue would be redundant and would not provide any value, especially because the Center had recently corrected the issue, our Office decided to concentrate its efforts on the issue of lapsed certification.

## About the Investigation

We reviewed the EMTs' training schedules and looked up their credentials using the Department of Health's (DOH) provider credential search. We identified one EMT whose credentials were lapsed during our investigative period, October 2017 through October 2018, and verified this information with the Center.

We spoke with the EMT – a security guard at the facility, not a firefighter – who told us that security guards do not respond to incidents as often as the firefighters and not in the same capacity. The EMT acknowledged that his credentialing was not current for about seven months during our investigative period. He said he began working at the Center a few months before our investigative period and had to catch up on his training for certification. He said he might have responded to a few incidents, but only in the capacity as a security guard, not as an EMT. We confirmed the information he provided with another security guard who often works with the EMT.

We spoke with the subject, who said the fire station currently has 10 full-time EMTs and although the Center has sent about 40 non-fire station employees, mostly security guards, to EMT training, at this time only eight are still certified. He said people volunteer to take the training, but after a while, they do not want to do it any longer and they let their certification lapse. He said that with

---

<sup>1</sup> [WB 16-019](#)

the addition of security guards who came in with the training, the Center now has 12 certified EMTs, in addition to the 10 in the fire station. He said the Center is in its best shape in years.

He said the volunteer EMTs, which include the security guards, have monthly training at the fire station to keep their certification up-to-date. Because the DOH is the entity that certifies EMTs, the training information is forwarded to it.

The subject said, as did the EMT, that the EMT only responded in the capacity as a security guard to incidents at the Center that occurred during our investigative period.

Because emergency incidents and the responders are entered into a database managed by the DOH, we contacted a staff member and verified that the EMT had in fact not responded in that capacity during the time his certification was lapsed.

Therefore, we found no reasonable cause to believe an improper governmental action occurred.

### **State Auditor's Office Concluding Remarks**

We thank Department officials and personnel for their assistance and cooperation during the investigation.

## WHISTLEBLOWER INVESTIGATION CRITERIA

We came to our determination in this investigation by evaluating the facts against the criteria below:

### **WAC 246-976-144 EMS certification.**

(1) Certification is effective on the date the department issues the certificate. Certifications must be renewed every three years. The expiration date is indicated on the certification card.