



STATE OF NEW YORK
OFFICE OF THE STATE COMPTROLLER

January 16, 2014

Ann Marie T. Sullivan, M.D.
Acting Commissioner
Office of Mental Health
44 Holland Avenue
Albany, NY 12229

Dear Dr. Sullivan:

As part of the Bureau of State Expenditures' examination¹ of employee travel expenses, we identified questionable travel card expenses incurred by the Office of Mental Health's (OMH) Director of Suicide Prevention (Director) on March 11, 2013. Based on these questionable transactions, we reviewed all travel expenses incurred by the Director for the period May 1, 2010 through November 30, 2013 to determine whether the travel expenses were appropriate and made in accordance with the New York State travel rules and regulations.

We found the Director certified \$4,666 in inappropriate or unsupported travel expenses on vouchers and expense reports. This includes \$2,020 in inappropriate travel expenses the Director certified as "just, true and correct" on 38 travel vouchers and expense reports during the scope of our review, including travel expenses charged to the New York State travel card and paid directly by OMH. It also includes \$2,646 in travel expenses the Director did not support when submitting vouchers and expense reports for reimbursement.

Based on the nature of the findings, the Director may have intentionally claimed \$2,020 in inappropriate travel expenses for personal enrichment. Specifically, we found the Director:

- Claimed \$963 in meal reimbursements for which she was not entitled by falsifying travel times on vouchers and expense reports. This includes:
 - \$87 for extra meals that were paid based on the time the Director claimed she returned from a trip. Although the time stamps on car rental receipts the Director submitted to OMH to substantiate meal expenses were obscured, we obtained documentation directly from the rental car company and determined the Director

¹We performed our examination in accordance with the State Comptroller's authority as set forth in Article V, Section 1 of the State Constitution, as well as Article II, Section 8, and Article VII, Section 111 of the State Finance Law.

arrived home earlier than claimed and, therefore, was not entitled to the meal reimbursements. Additionally, although the Director claimed that the illegibility was due to bad copies, we question whether the time stamps were deliberately obscured as they were the only part of the receipts that were illegible.

- \$571 for extra meals that the Director was ineligible to receive based on the return time stamps contained on the travel documentation (i.e., rental car and toll receipts) submitted by the Director. With appropriate supervisory review of this travel documentation, OMH officials should have identified and denied these inappropriate meals claimed by the Director.
- \$305 in meal per diems that the Director was not entitled to based on her departure and return times. OMH identified and disallowed these claims prior to payment.
- Claimed \$816 in inappropriate travel card charges that she subsequently reimbursed. This includes:
 - Charges totaling \$347 for personal items (i.e., hotel reward points, taxi cab fare, and a hotel charge) not allowed on the travel card. After we questioned business office staff about these charges, the Director reimbursed the State for the inappropriate charges.
 - Charges for per diems that exceeded the daily per diem limits by \$469. We question whether the Director may have attempted to reduce the amount she had to reimburse on at least six expense reports by claiming additional meal per diems based on the falsified departure and/or arrival times discussed above.
- Claimed \$21 by falsifying the departure location on an expense report to receive mileage reimbursement to which she was not entitled. The Director claimed she drove 74 miles roundtrip to the Albany/Rensselaer Amtrak station when the travel documentation showed she actually drove only 36 miles roundtrip to the Schenectady Amtrak station.
- Claimed \$220 in other miscellaneous inappropriate travel expenses.

Of the \$2,020 in inappropriate travel expenses claimed, the Director received \$899 in improper reimbursements and OMH paid Citibank \$816 for inappropriate travel card charges the Director made from OMH. As noted above, OMH denied the remaining \$305 in inappropriate meal per diem expenses claimed.

We also found the Director obtained an additional \$2,646 in travel reimbursements to which she may not have been entitled to by failing to provide documentation to support those expenses. This includes \$1,719 in meal expenses that were reimbursed based on unsupported departure and arrival times and \$927 in travel expenses where there was not enough documentation to substantiate the trips actually occurred.

As a result, we are referring this matter to the Albany County District Attorney's Office for its review and ask that you cooperate with any review undertaken by the District Attorney.

We recommend you obtain sufficient appropriate evidence to verify the unsupported travel expenses and recover any overpayments identified. We also recommend that you train OMH supervisory staff on how to properly review travel vouchers and expense reports prior to approving and submitting them for payment.

We would appreciate your response to this report by January 30, 2014 indicating any actions planned to address the recommendations. We thank the management and staff of the Office of Mental Health for the courtesies and cooperation extended to our auditors.

Sincerely,

Bernard J. McHugh
Director of State Expenditures

cc: Martha Schaefer Hayes
Kenneth Lawrence
Nelson Sheingold