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COMPTROLLER



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STATE OF NEW YORK  
OFFICE OF THE STATE COMPTROLLER

November 21, 2013

Ms. Arlene González-Sánchez  
Commissioner  
Office of Alcoholism and Substance Abuse Services  
1450 Western Avenue  
Albany, NY 12203

Re: Fire Prevention, Safety and Control  
Report 2013-S-40

Dear Commissioner González-Sánchez:

According to the State Comptroller's authority as set forth in Article V, Section 1 of the State Constitution and Article II, Section 8 of State Finance Law, we audited the Office of Alcoholism and Substance Abuse Services (Office) compliance with applicable fire prevention, safety and control requirements that help ensure the safety of vulnerable populations.

**Background**

The Office plans, develops and regulates the State's system of chemical dependency and gambling treatment programs. This includes direct operation of 12 Addiction Treatment Centers, which provide inpatient rehabilitation services to 10,000 persons per year. The Office licenses, funds and supervises some 1,014 local community-based programs which serve about 110,000 persons in facilities on any given day with a wide range of comprehensive services. The Uniform Fire Prevention and Building Code requires each State agency to conduct periodic fire safety inspections of all buildings. The Office has approximately 675 facilities that provide daytime services, and 339 facilities that provide services 24 hours a day, seven days a week and house people overnight (bedded facilities). Fire safety inspections are conducted annually at the bedded facilities, and every other year at daytime facilities. These inspections are conducted by fire safety experts from the Office's Facilities Evaluation and Inspection Unit.

**Results of Audit**

Based on our review, we found the Office is in compliance with applicable fire prevention, safety and control requirements that help ensure the safety of the vulnerable populations it

serves. We focused most of our audit efforts on bedded facilities, as they often contain the most at risk population. All facilities are inspected using a comprehensive fire safety inspection guide to ensure consistent and thorough coverage. Upon completing an inspection, fire safety experts issue an inspection report to each respective facility detailing any fire safety matters in need of correction. Facility managers are then required to submit a Corrective Action Plan designed to eliminate any fire safety risks identified. The Office files all inspection reports into an electronic data tracking system that produces a monthly summary report. All violations remain on this report until repairs are completed. In addition, the Office requires all facilities to conduct fire safety training for all staff and periodic fire evacuation drills.

We conducted site visits to five judgmentally selected bedded facilities to follow up on fire safety issues identified in their most recent inspection. In total, the five facilities had 27 fire safety issues ranging from inadequate documentation of training and fire systems testing, to a failure to install fire rated sheetrock in a basement. Of these 27 fire safety issues, 25 (92%) had been adequately corrected at the time of our visit, while the remaining two were in the process of being corrected. During our visits, we also reviewed training records for facility staff and found that all staff had been given initial fire safety training, along with annual refresher updates, as required. In addition, we reviewed fire evacuation drill records and found the facilities followed required practices. We examined service tags on fire extinguishers and found all had current inspection dates, and found working smoke detectors in every room and evacuation plans on each floor. We also examined the existing fire alarm system at each facility and found that all had current inspection dates.

### **Audit Scope, Objective and Methodology**

We audited fire safety practices at the Office for the period January 1, 2012 to October 31, 2013. The objective of our audit was to determine if the Office is in compliance with applicable fire prevention, safety and control requirements to help ensure the safety of the vulnerable populations it serves.

To accomplish our objective, we reviewed pertinent laws, rules and regulations, Office policies and fire safety inspection records. We also interviewed Office and facility officials and visited five judgmentally selected bedded facilities to determine the adequacy of fire safety inspections and management's actions to correct problems identified.

We conducted our performance audit in accordance with generally accepted government auditing standards. Those standards require that we plan and perform the audit to obtain sufficient, appropriate evidence to provide a reasonable basis for our findings and conclusions based on our audit objectives. We believe that the evidence obtained provides a reasonable basis for our findings and conclusions based on our audit objective.

In addition to being the State Auditor, the Comptroller performs certain other constitutionally and statutorily mandated duties as the chief fiscal officer of New York State. These include operating the State's accounting system; preparing the State's financial statements; and approving State contracts, refunds, and other payments. In addition, the Comptroller appoints

members to certain boards, commissions and public authorities, some of whom have minority voting rights. These duties may be considered management functions for purposes of evaluating organizational independence under generally accepted government auditing standards. In our opinion, these functions do not affect our ability to conduct independent audits of program performance.

### **Reporting Requirements**

We discussed the results of our audit with Office officials, who agreed with our conclusions and waived the opportunity to provide formal written comments to be included in this final report.

Major contributors to this report were Brian Reilly, Brian Lotz, Lynn Freeman, Carmine Berghela and Dylan Spring.

Please convey our thanks to Office management and staff for the courtesies and cooperation they extended to our auditors during this review.

Sincerely,

John F. Buyce, CPA  
Audit Director

cc: Trisha Schell-Guy, OASAS  
Thomas Lukacs, Division of the Budget