

Audit Report

Office of People's Counsel

December 2016



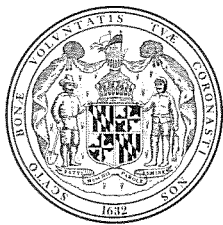
OFFICE OF LEGISLATIVE AUDITS
DEPARTMENT OF LEGISLATIVE SERVICES
MARYLAND GENERAL ASSEMBLY

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DEPARTMENT OF LEGISLATIVE SERVICES
OFFICE OF LEGISLATIVE AUDITS
MARYLAND GENERAL ASSEMBLY

Warren G. Deschenaux
Executive Director

Thomas J. Barnickel III, CPA
Legislative Auditor

December 7, 2016

Senator Guy J. Guzzone, Co-Chair, Joint Audit Committee
Delegate C. William Frick, Co-Chair, Joint Audit Committee
Members of Joint Audit Committee
Annapolis, Maryland

Ladies and Gentlemen:

We have conducted a fiscal compliance audit of the Office of People's Counsel (OPC) for the period beginning January 9, 2014 and ending October 20, 2016. OPC is an independent State agency that represents Maryland's residential consumers of certain regulated services (including electricity, natural gas, telephone, and private water services) on matters and in proceedings before the Public Service Commission, federal agencies, the appellate courts, and the General Assembly.

Our audit did not disclose any findings.

We wish to acknowledge the cooperation extended to us during the course of this audit by OPC.

Respectfully submitted,

Thomas J. Barnickel III, CPA
Legislative Auditor

Background Information

Agency Responsibilities

The Office of People's Counsel (OPC) is an independent State agency that represents Maryland's residential consumers of certain regulated services (including electricity, natural gas, telephone, and private water services). OPC advocates on behalf of residential consumers and their interests on matters and in proceedings before the Public Service Commission, federal agencies, the appellate courts, and the General Assembly. According to the State's records, OPC's expenditures were approximately \$3.9 million during fiscal year 2016.

Status of Finding From Preceding Audit Report

Our audit included a review to determine the status of the finding contained in our preceding audit report dated June 19, 2014. We determined that OPC satisfactorily addressed this finding.

Findings and Recommendations

Our audit did not disclose any significant deficiencies in the design or operation of OPC's internal control. Our audit also did not disclose any significant instances of noncompliance with applicable laws, rules, or regulations.

A draft copy of this report was provided to OPC. Since there are no recommendations in this report, a written response was not necessary.

Audit Scope, Objectives, and Methodology

We have conducted a fiscal compliance audit of the Office of People's Counsel (OPC) for the period beginning January 9, 2014 and ending October 20, 2016. The audit was conducted 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 objectives.

As prescribed by the State Government Article, Section 2-1221 of the Annotated Code of Maryland, the objectives of this audit were to examine OPC's financial transactions, records, and internal control, and to evaluate its compliance with applicable State laws, rules, and regulations.

In planning and conducting our audit, we focused on the major financial-related areas of operations based on assessments of significance and risk. The areas addressed by the audit included procurements, disbursements, and payroll. We also determined the status of the finding contained in our preceding audit report.

To accomplish our audit objectives, our audit procedures included inquiries of appropriate personnel, inspections of documents and records, observations of OPC's operations, and tests of transactions. Generally, transactions were selected for testing based on auditor judgment, which primarily considers risk. Unless otherwise specifically indicated, neither statistical nor non-statistical audit sampling was used to select the transactions tested. Therefore, the results of the tests cannot be used to project those results to the entire population from which the test items were selected.

We also performed various data extracts of pertinent information from the State's Financial Management Information System (such as revenue and expenditure data) and the State's Central Payroll Bureau (payroll data). The extracts are performed as part of ongoing internal processes established by the Office of Legislative Audits and were subject to various tests to determine data reliability. We determined that the data extracted from these sources were sufficiently reliable for the purposes the data were used during this audit. Finally, we performed other auditing procedures that we considered necessary to achieve our objectives. The reliability of data used in this report for background or informational purposes was not assessed.

OPC's management is responsible for establishing and maintaining effective internal control. Internal control is a process designed to provide reasonable assurance that objectives pertaining to the reliability of financial records, effectiveness and efficiency of operations, including safeguarding of assets, and compliance with applicable laws, rules, and regulations are achieved.

Because of inherent limitations in internal control, errors or fraud may nevertheless occur and not be detected. Also, projections of any evaluation of internal control to future periods are subject to the risk that conditions may change or compliance with policies and procedures may deteriorate.

Our reports are designed to assist the Maryland General Assembly in exercising its legislative oversight function and to provide constructive recommendations for improving State operations. As a result, our reports generally do not address activities we reviewed that are functioning properly.

AUDIT TEAM

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