



STATE OF NEW YORK  
OFFICE OF THE STATE INSPECTOR GENERAL

**Final Report**  
**October 22, 2007**

**Investigation Results in Improved Job Applicant Screening at OCFS**

SUMMARY OF FINDINGS/RECOMMENDATIONS

An investigation by State Inspector General Kristine Hamann of an allegation that an employee of the Office and Children Family Services (OCFS) forged a high school diploma to meet hiring qualifications was not substantiated. During this investigation, however, the Inspector General did determine that the employee included possible misstatements regarding her employment history on her resume and, therefore, may not have met the requirements for the position. This finding was referred to OCFS for appropriate action. In response, OCFS advised that it will implement recommended improvements in job applicant background screening.

ALLEGATION

The Inspector General received this complaint on April 16, 2007. In substance, it was alleged that Kim Morris reproduced another individual's high school diploma, deleted the name utilizing "white-out", and inserted her name on the document. This diploma was submitted with her job application. The complainant also alleged that Morris was friendly with a supervisor at the facility and that is the reason that an earlier complaint about this matter was not addressed by management.

SUMMARY OF INVESTIGATION

Morris has been employed by OCFS as a Youth Developmental Aide (YDA) since September 2, 1999. Morris works at OCFS's Pyramid Reception Center in the Bronx, and has been assigned there since beginning her employment with OCFS. The reception center is an interim facility where convicted male juveniles are processed before beginning a period of incarceration. Morris's duties as a YDA include supervising these juveniles and conducting certain informational sessions.

The Inspector General reviewed Morris' personnel file. A copy of her high school diploma was not contained in her file and does not appear to have been filed with OCFS. A review of Morris' resume, however, which was submitted when Morris first applied for the position, indicates that she received her high school diploma from Forest Hills High School. The Inspector General contacted Forest Hills High School and determined that Morris was not a graduate, as indicated on her resume.

The Inspector General obtained the requirements for the position of YDA in effect at the time of Morris's hiring. These requirements do not include a high school diploma. In lieu of a diploma, a qualified applicant may instead have "two years full-time experience in the care and programming of youth under 21 years of age OR two years of full-time experience in the care, programming and/or secure custody of residential clients in a health care, mental hygiene or correctional institutional setting." Therefore, based on her resume, Morris may have ostensibly qualified for the position despite the lack of a high diploma or Grade Equivalency Diploma (GED).

The Inspector General reviewed Morris's employment history as submitted to OCFS. It should be noted that Morris's resume was vague as to the amount of time she worked in each position, as only the years – not specific months – were noted. The Inspector General determined that Morris exaggerated the scope of her duties in certain positions and may have completely fabricated other positions. For instance, for a period of approximately three years, Morris claimed to be a counselor/clerical worker for the Ralph J. Rangel Youth Employment Training Program (Rangel Program). The Inspector General learned that the Rangel Program is run by New York City and all employees and volunteers are listed with the New York City Housing Authority. A search of the Housing Authority records indicates that Morris was never an employee or a volunteer. The Inspector General determined, however, that Morris did reside in the Rangel Housing Projects - where the program is located - for a substantial time.

During interviews conducted by the Inspector General's Office, Morris stated that she did not have a high school diploma, as her resume indicates, or a GED. Morris also admitted to enhancing the times she was employed in the positions listed on her resume, but maintains that she did indeed work in all of those positions. Regarding the Rangel Program, Morris stated that she was a volunteer. When questioned more closely by the Inspector General's Office, Morris admitted that she was not an official volunteer.

The Inspector General's Office interviewed Pat Moses, the director of the reception center at the time. Moses told this Office that she received a complaint that Morris forged her high school diploma. In response to that complaint, Moses obtained the hiring requirements in effect at the time. Moses, in conjunction with the facility personnel unit, determined that, based on the experience listed on her resume, Morris did not require a high school diploma to qualify for the YDA position.

## FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The allegation that Kim Morris forged a high school diploma is not substantiated. However, because of vagueness and possible misstatements in her resume, she may not have qualified for employment as a YDA. This matter was referred to OFCS for appropriate action.

This Office also recommended that OCFS review its policies regarding pre-employment background checks to ensure that candidates' educational and employment histories are authentic. In this regard, OCFS might consider modifications to its current employment application to require more specific periods pertaining to the employment history of the candidate.

In response, OCFS advised that it believes an adequate background was conducted of Morris and that she met the "essential qualifications" when she was hired, although the person who hired her is no longer with the agency. OCFS also advised that it intends to implement this Office's recommendation of better background screening by "develop[ing] questions for our employees to use when verifying a candidate's credentials and experience. These questions and our policy 2021.03 will be reviewed and discussed with hiring managers." The agency further advised that it will specifically request month and year on the employment history section of the employment application.