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October 8, 2014

Arlene González-Sánchez
Commissioner
New York State Office of Alcoholism and Substance Abuse Services
1450 Western Avenue
Albany, New York 12203-3526

RE: NYS IG 0896-009-2011

Dear Commissioner González-Sánchez:

My office received an anonymous complaint alleging that [REDACTED], a Facilities Planner 1 at the Office of Alcoholism and Substance Abuse Services (OASAS) submitted fraudulent travel expenditures resulting in his receipt of nearly \$13,000 in improper reimbursements. I am writing to advise you of the results of our investigation of this matter.

As part of his job duties, [REDACTED] inspects clinics, residential facilities, and other facilities providing services to individuals with drug and alcohol dependencies. These facilities are inspected on an annual or bi-annual basis depending on the type of services they provide, unless circumstances warrant more frequent inspections. [REDACTED] job requires statewide travel and preparation of written reports of the facility inspections he conducts.

An internal audit by OASAS in July 2010 of [REDACTED] travel from April 1, 2007 to March 31, 2010 identified approximately \$12,800 in questionable expenses, all of which were approved by his supervisor, [REDACTED]. The questionable expenses resulted from inefficiencies in [REDACTED] itineraries, specifically his practice of lodging in locations that often were unreasonable distances from the sites he inspected. As a consequence, [REDACTED] who was permitted to use his personal vehicle for agency business, requested and received reimbursement for travel that was excessive and unnecessary. The audit also

found that [REDACTED] added an unnecessary overnight hotel stay at the end of several trips, returning home on a Saturday, for which he received compensatory time and overtime. As a result of the audit, OASAS counseled both [REDACTED] and [REDACTED] but did not take disciplinary action or seek to recover any unnecessary or excessive travel reimbursements. [REDACTED] supervisor, advised us that as a result of the audit, she requested that [REDACTED] improve his supervision of [REDACTED], including a weekly review of [REDACTED] proposed itinerary.

Of note, OASAS did not notify my office of this matter as required by Executive Law Article 4-A. Instead, my office received an anonymous complaint, upon which we found that [REDACTED] continued to inadequately perform this oversight and that [REDACTED] still sought reimbursement for unnecessary and improper travel. Our review of [REDACTED] travel and inspection activities during the period August 2010 to mid-July 2013 revealed instances when [REDACTED] itineraries did not match his travel vouchers or purported inspections. For example, [REDACTED] claimed that on September 15, 2010, he conducted 18 inspections at 15 sites – two in Buffalo and 13 in Albany. However, according to [REDACTED] travel voucher and itinerary, he worked only in Buffalo from September 15-17, 2010, with no travel to Albany. Discrepancies were also noted between [REDACTED] claimed inspections and his corresponding inspection reports. For the 18 inspections [REDACTED] claimed to have conducted on September 15, 2010, only four reports were located. Further, the OASAS database reflects that [REDACTED] conducted 77 inspections from January to July 2013, but only 72 inspection reports were located for that period. Despite repeated inquiries by my office, OASAS has not provided information that would explain these discrepancies.

I am also concerned that OASAS might be incurring additional unnecessary expenses as a result of [REDACTED] use of his personal vehicle for agency travel. It appears that OASAS approved this arrangement on the basis of a medical note dated October 13, 2010, which merely stated [REDACTED] required “full size vehicle for medical reasons.”

Based on these findings, I recommend that OASAS conduct a comprehensive audit of [REDACTED] more recent travel and review the adequacy of [REDACTED] supervision. OASAS should also reconcile the discrepancies between [REDACTED] previously claimed inspections and submitted inspection reports. Violations of agency policy by [REDACTED] or [REDACTED] should result in appropriate action. OASAS should also take steps to ensure that agency employees comply with the requirement in New York State Executive Law Article 4-A to promptly notify my office of alleged or actual misconduct. In addition, I request that you advise me of the analysis that was undertaken to justify [REDACTED] use of his personal vehicle for agency travel.

It is requested that within 45 days you advise this office of any actions or decisions taken in response to these recommendations. If you have any questions or concerns, please do not hesitate to contact me.

Sincerely,



Catherine Leahy Scott
Inspector General