Office of the
INSPECTOR GENERAL

REPORT OF INVESTIGATION

File Number:	07-012
Agency:	Georgia Department of Human Resources
Basis for Investigation:	Anonymous Complaint
Allegations:	Improper Hiring Practices, Misuse of Authority, Inaccurate Data Reporting
Date Opened:	February 6, 2007
Investigated By:	Deborah W. Copeland Deputy Inspector General
Date of Report:	June 24, 2007

Elizabeth P. Archer, Inspector General

OFFICE OF THE INSPECTOR GENERAL

File Number: 07-012
EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This investigation was conducted based on the receipt of a complaint alleging that the Department of Human Resources (DHR), Division of Family and Children Services Call Center Director, Erica Cockfield, misrepresented information on her state employment application, and therefore, did not possess the requisite qualifications for her position. The complainant also alleged that Director Cockfield misused her authority relating to personnel actions in the hiring and promotion of certain employees, and that she inaccurately reported statistical information.

The Office of Inspector General worked with officials from DHR's Office of Human Resources Management Development to review the specifics of this complaint, and determined that the allegations against Cockfield lack merit and cannot be substantiated. Our investigation confirmed that Cockfield was selected to work in her capacity as DFCS Call Center Director as an "agent of change" and that she possesses the professional qualifications, work experience, and formal education required by the position.

Cockfield has continued to receive support from her superiors to effect many organizational changes required to optimize efficiency. As a result of her leadership, staffing modifications have occurred, data collection efforts have been revamped, and work processes have been reconfigured in the Call Center. Along with these changes, however, natural resistance surfaced, venting resulted from those who are disgruntled, and internal grievances were filed which were subsequently ruled unsubstantiated.

Our investigation revealed that managerial actions were carefully thought through and carried out according to approved methods within current DHR policies and procedures. We conclude from our findings that no fraud or abuse exists as alleged by the complainant.

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Summary of Actions
Department of Human Resources
File Number 07-012

I. BASIS FOR INVESTIGATION

In February 2007, the Office of Inspector General (OIG) received an anonymous complaint alleging that the Department of Human Resources, Division of Family and Children Services Call Center Director, Erica Cockfield, misrepresented information on her state employment application, and therefore, did not possess the requisite qualifications for her position. The complainant also alleged that Director Cockfield misused her authority regarding personnel actions in the hiring and promotion of certain employees, and that she inaccurately reported statistical information.

II. ACTION TAKEN IN FURTHERANCE OF INVESTIGATION

During the course of this preliminary inquiry, OIG conducted relevant interviews, retrieved internal records as applicable, reviewed existing policies and procedures, and established contact with former employers and educational institutions to verify information.

III. NARRATIVE

A. Background

DHR is one of the largest agencies in state government with 20,000 employees serving all Georgia citizens through regulatory inspection, direct service, and financial assistance programs. The department is comprised of four divisions, one of which is the Division of Family and Children Services (DFCS). DFCS is responsible for Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF), food stamp benefits, and social services to assist low-income families or families in crisis.

The employees named in the complaint are assigned to work in the DFCS Call Center. The Call Center is comprised of two sites managed by a director, 2 associate directors, 14 supervisors, and 120 customer care service representatives. The goal of the Call Center is to provide the highest level of customer care while effectively and efficiently processing changes for Georgia recipients of TANF, Medicaid, and Food Stamps. Currently, the Governor's Office of Customer Service is sponsoring an accreditation effort for the Call Center, which, if approved, will make it the first accredited Call Center in Georgia.

B. Investigative Actions

Our investigation revealed that Cockfield was hired by DHR as the DFCS Call Center Director in February 2006. The job announcement was initially posted in October 2005. Our investigation confirmed that proper human resources procedures were executed by DHR officials in the screening of applicants and subsequent selection and hiring of Cockfield for this position. It appears that the agency took reasonable steps to ensure the vacancy was advertised in a manner that attracted diverse, qualified applicants.

Allegation: That Cockfield misrepresented her academic and work experience on her state application

Records discovered during our investigation dispute the complainant's allegation that Cockfield misrepresented herself on her application and that she had questionable supervisory and/or call center experience. To the contrary, Cockfield's professional experience and formal educational accomplishments have been fully vetted by OIG. Our findings are consistent with the information Cockfield reported on her state application. In addition, our investigation revealed that reference checks were conducted by the hiring official as required by DHR policy. However, we were only able to obtain verbal confirmation that this was done, since the hiring official has since been transferred and could not locate the file.

Allegation: That Cockfield misused her authority regarding hiring, promotions, and time and attendance transactions

The complainant alleged that after she was hired, Director Cockfield misused her authority in the hiring and promotion of certain employees who reported to her at the Call Center. The complaint insinuated that these personnel actions were facilitated because of prior friendships. In addition, it is alleged that Cockfield did not appropriately charge one of these employees for leave that was taken shortly after the employee began working in the Call Center.

Our investigation revealed that Cockfield participated in a panel interview of the particular employee mentioned in the complaint, but did not make the final selection decision as to the employee's hire. The decision was made by another individual who no longer works in the Call Center. With regards to the time and attendance issue, it was revealed during this investigation that the employee was inadvertently not charged for five hours of annual leave. However, the incident was not precipitated by Cockfield. Instead records show that on August 30, 2006, Cockfield clearly articulated in an email to officials in the local DFCS Personnel Office, the need to specifically deduct five hours of annual leave and 26 hours of leave without pay from the employee's accrued balance, detailing exact dates. The Personnel Office, however, unintentionally mishandled the leave transaction occurrence, failing to deduct the five hours of annual leave as Cockfield requested. The employee's official leave record has since been corrected.

Allegation: That Cockfield misrepresented statistical information at the Call Center regarding personnel turnover

It was also alleged in the complaint that Cockfield inaccurately reported statistical information about the Call Center, which is now undergoing efforts to become accredited. The complaint suggested that Cockfield manipulated the data by reporting "zero turnover" of personnel. Our investigation refutes this allegation and clearly shows that "turnover" was not focused on until October 2006. Call Center management did not report this particular statistic to any source until January 2007. Records retrieved by OIG document the fact that record keeping and reviews are carefully executed on a monthly basis. This effort is facilitated in collaboration with the Governor's Office of Customer Service and Benchmark Portal, an independent accrediting organization.

IV. CONCLUSION

During our preliminary inquiry, DHR Commissioner B. J. Walker and OHRMD officials seemed to welcome OIG's independent review of this matter ensuring no fraud or abuse exists within the DFCS Call Center as alleged by the complainant.

Our investigation confirmed that Cockfield was selected to work in her capacity as DFCS Call Center Director as an "agent of change." We verified that she possesses the professional qualifications, work experience, and formal education required by the position. In addition, our investigation revealed that Cockfield's managerial actions were carried out consistent with policy and procedures currently in place at DHR.

Cockfield has continued to receive support from her superiors to effect many organizational changes required to optimize efficiency. As a result of her leadership, staffing modifications have occurred, data collection efforts have been revamped, and work processes have been reconfigured in the Call Center. Along with these changes, however, natural resistance surfaced, venting resulted from those who are disgruntled, and internal grievances have been filed which have been ruled unsubstantiated.

Based on our review, we conclude that allegations against Erica Cockfield lack merit and cannot be substantiated.

V. RECOMMENDATIONS

None.