

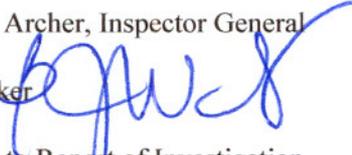


B. J. Walker, Commissioner

Georgia Department of Human Resources • Two Peachtree Street, NW • Suite 29.250 • Atlanta, Georgia 30303-3142 • Phone: 404-656-5680

August 7, 2007

MEMORANDUM

To: Elizabeth Archer, Inspector General
From: B. J. Walker 
Subject: Response to Report of Investigation
File Number: 07-020

Thank you for the opportunity to respond to the recommendations contained in the referenced report of investigation. For ease of reference, I have restated each of your recommendations below, and followed each recommendation with our response.

Recommendation #1. Require hiring managers to provide OHRMD with thorough and complete documentation in support of an applicant's qualifications before being hired. Documentation must be specific to the applicant's demonstration of job-related competencies and should include official copies of required educational credentials, licenses, and/or certifications. It is imperative that all new hires are fully qualified and certified to perform their job duties.

Response: We certainly agree that all new hires must be qualified to perform their job duties. Our procedure, therefore, will be to have Human Resources (HR) staff screen applicants prior to referral to hiring managers. We will reinforce our policy and practice that HR staff must ensure that each applicant referred to a hiring manager for consideration is qualified for the position in question. If a hiring manager makes initial contact with an applicant or refers an applicant, we will ensure that the hiring manager obtains a qualifications review by HR prior to any offer of employment to the applicant. As you are aware, prior to July 1, 2007, the field HR staff in DHR reported to line management in the program divisions. Without line authority over these staff, it was difficult to ensure that a Human Resources review of applicant qualifications was performed when positions were filled in field offices. Effective July 1, 2007, the field HR staff report directly to DHR's Director of Human Resources. This will enable us to ensure that the HR review of qualifications is performed and that no applicant is hired who does not meet the qualifications for the position.

Recommendation #2. Require prospective employees, whether hourly or salaried, to provide official academic transcripts to OHRMD for inclusion into the employee's Official Personnel File. This will confirm professional education as referenced on the applicants' resume and/or state application. The agency should not accept copies of transcripts without official seals.

Response: We are already requiring official academic transcripts directly from the college or university for Social Services Case Managers, and we will revise our policy to provide that this must be done for all other positions for which academic credentials are a factor in the applicant's selection, and to provide that academic transcripts be included in official personnel files. This policy change will be implemented by August 31, 2007. It would be helpful if this policy could be considered for implementation on a state, enterprise-wide basis so that appropriate

technology can be obtained in an economical manner and agencies can handle this issue uniformly.

Recommendation #3. Ensure applicants selected for hiring possess the minimum qualifications advertised in the position description.

Response: As stated above, HR staff will ensure that applicants possess the qualifications for the position before referring applicants to hiring managers for hiring consideration. The screening to be performed by Human Resources staff will be performed by comparison of the individual applicant's qualifications with the statement of qualifications set forth in the position description.

Recommendation #4. Develop a better system of communication between OHRMD and local HR Division offices regarding management and employment issues. Personnel files maintained at the local level should mirror the Official Personnel File maintained in OHRMD.

Response: DHR's regionalization and consolidation of human resource functions, as described above in our response to your first recommendation, will vastly improve communications between central office and field HR staff. The issue of location of personnel files is currently under consideration. Our objective is an electronic record system that will eliminate the need for most paper documents currently maintained in personnel files. In the meantime, we will phase out the practice of having duplicate files.

Recommendation #5. Develop a better system of checks and balances between OHRMD and hiring managers to ensure that hiring procedures are followed in a manner that does not create an impression of favoritism or preferential treatment. In addition, all new hires should be required to sign a sworn statement confirming that the new hire has received orientation regarding the Department's extensive policies and procedures for use during the course of their employment. This statement should be included in the personnel file.

Response: DHR will continue to strive for improvement in all aspects of hiring, including reducing unnecessary delays and bureaucracy that greatly increase the cost of doing business. Fairness in hiring is crucial, and I can assure you that DHR does not tolerate hiring based on any criteria other than suitability to perform the work. I am proud of the fact that, while we hire thousands of employees each year, we have very few complaints of unfair hiring. I believe, however, that there is always room for improvement, and I will instruct my Leadership Team to emphasize fair hiring throughout their respective Divisions and Offices. New hires currently sign a form acknowledging standards of conduct and ethics in government, which is the single most critical policy governing employee conduct and behavior. Employees receive training concerning other policies and programs, e.g., sexual harassment prevention, customer service, valuing diversity.

Recommendation #6. Improve internal communication at all levels to engender a clearer understanding of organizational changes. The agency should have open and consistent communication providing direction and clarification of what it is doing not only with managers but also with its employees. This may foster smoother transitions, encourage productive participation, and decrease perceptions of impropriety.

Response: I support this recommendation wholeheartedly. In any large organization, it is a challenge to ensure that employees throughout the organization, especially those on the front lines, understand the mission, vision, and objectives of the organization and feel supported in their work. On August 10th, I will conduct my third videoconference with DHR employees designed to meet this challenge. A key aspect of this is a question & answer session that takes place during the conference and continues after the conference via electronic communication. We have also recently initiated a program of "Employee Roundtables" in which we solicit the input of employees around the key strategic objectives of DHR. We are committed to sharing the results of these discussions, acting on them where appropriate, and having ongoing similar discussions in the future. I expect my Leadership Team to engage their employees in similar or other creative ways to maximize the understanding of employees concerning our objectives and how we will achieve them.

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Recommendation #7. Ensure all managers and employees understand the importance of understanding and following the agency's Teleworking Policy and Procedures. In any Teleworking Agreement between a manager and employee, the manager must ensure that the employee's performance activity is supported by appropriate documentation.

Response: I have emphasized from the beginning of the work away initiative the need for accountability in this program, i.e., demonstrated documented work products and results. Our policy requires this, and we will continue to emphasize the need for management engagement and oversight to ensure that we are accountable in practice. We recognize that the finding cited in your report is serious, however, and we hereby commit to an aggressive effort to ensure that best practices relative to work away are embedded in all areas of DHR. This will include an examination of whether work away is occurring without an appropriate foundational basis. For example, we will review to ensure that the work to be performed is appropriate for an off-site location; and that the employee and supervisor have executed an agreement concerning the conditions of the work away approval. Most importantly, the review will include a reassessment of each work away relationship to confirm that results are being demonstrated and documented. In this regard, I believe the regionalization & consolidation of human resources will greatly enhance accountability, as our central HR office will have much greater ability to impact practices in the field.

Thank you again for the recommendations that you developed for my consideration and for the opportunity to respond. I believe that the Department will benefit from this experience.

BJW:dfn

c: Mr. Jim Lientz
Ms. Rosa Waymon