



John A. Carey
Inspector General

OFFICE OF INSPECTOR GENERAL
PALM BEACH COUNTY



Inspector General
Accredited

“Enhancing Public Trust in Government”

**Redacted per §119.071 (5)(b) and (5)(f)1,
F .S., and 15 U.S.C. §9058a(4)(A)**

Investigative Report

2022-0009

**False Information on County
COVID-19 Assistance Program
Applications by City of Delray Beach
Employee**

March 28, 2023



John A. Carey
Inspector General

OFFICE OF INSPECTOR GENERAL PALM BEACH COUNTY

INVESTIGATIVE REPORT 2022-0009

DATE ISSUED: March 28, 2023



Inspector General
Accredited

"Enhancing Public Trust in Government"

FALSE INFORMATION ON COUNTY COVID-19 ASSISTANCE PROGRAM APPLICATIONS BY CITY OF DELRAY BEACH EMPLOYEE

SUMMARY

WHAT WE DID

The Palm Beach County (County) Office of Inspector General (OIG) received a complaint from the Palm Beach County Community Services Department (Community Services) concerning [REDACTED] (Applicant)'s applications to the County Coronavirus Aid, Relief and Economic Security (CARES) Act – Coronavirus Relief Fund Rental, Utilities, and Food Assistance Program and Emergency Rental and Utilities Assistance Program (ERA Program).

Community Services alleged that Applicant submitted several assistance applications with fraudulent letters from his employer, the City of Delray Beach, Florida (Delray Beach), stating that his hours had been reduced, resulting in a loss of income.

Based upon our initial review of Applicant's applications and accompanying documents, the OIG initiated an investigation of the following allegation:

Allegation (1): Applicant provided false information to the County in his assistance applications, which resulted in improper grant funding from County programs.

Our office reviewed Applicant's assistance applications, supporting documents and program guidelines. We also interviewed Applicant and representatives of Delray Beach.

WHAT WE FOUND

Allegation (1) is supported. We found that Applicant submitted falsified documents to the County in support of his assistance applications.

As a result of his actions, the County approved five assistance applications and issued payments totaling \$7,007.25 for Applicant's benefit. The inappropriate payments resulted in Identified Costs¹ of \$7,007.25.

We found sufficient information to warrant referring our findings to law enforcement (with a copy to the State Attorney's Office)

¹ Identified costs are costs that have been identified as dollars that have the potential of being returned to the entity to offset the taxpayers' burden.

for a determination of whether the facts arise to a criminal act under section 817.03, Florida Statutes.

We also found sufficient information to warrant notification of our findings to the United States Attorney's Office for a determination of whether they constitute a

violation of Title 18, Chapter 47, section 1001, United States Criminal Code.

WHAT WE RECOMMEND

We make one recommendation; that the County seek reimbursement of \$7,007.25 in inappropriately issued funds.

BACKGROUND

The CARES Act

On March 1, 2020, Florida Governor Ron DeSantis directed the State Health Officer to issue a public health emergency in the State of Florida due to the COVID-19 pandemic. On March 13, 2020, then-Palm Beach County Mayor Dave Kerner declared a state of emergency in the County due to COVID-19.



On March 27, 2020, the President signed the CARES Act into law. The CARES Act allocated \$2.2 trillion in economic relief to individuals, businesses, and governments affected by COVID-19. State governments were allocated a total of \$139 billion based on their populations (as measured by the U.S. Census Bureau in 2019), with no state receiving less than \$1.25 billion. Florida received a total of \$8.328 billion, with \$261,174,832 of that total provided to Palm Beach County.

On May 15, 2020, the Palm Beach County Board of County Commissioners dedicated \$40 million of the approximately \$261 million allocated to it for “Emergency Mortgage, Rental and Utility Assistance.” Community Services administrated the Rental Assistance portion of this funding.

CARES Act - Coronavirus Relief Fund Rental, Utilities, and Food Assistance Program Guidelines

The CARES Act- Coronavirus Relief Fund Rental, Utilities, and Food Assistance Program was designed to utilize CARES Act funds to provide one-time rental and utility assistance to eligible County residents who experienced loss of income, reduction in hours, or unemployment as a direct result of the COVID-19 pandemic. The Community Services website explained that in order to be eligible for the program, the applicant must reside within the corporate limits of Palm Beach County and have documentable information to evidence loss of income, reduction in hours, or unemployment because of the COVID-19 pandemic, that contributed to missed rental payments and/or utility payments. Eligibility guidelines on the website also listed the income and asset requirements to qualify for the program. Assistance was provided for past due rent and/or utilities due from March 1, 2020 to December 31, 2020.

Emergency Rental Assistance Program

On March 9, 2021, under the authority of the U.S. Department of Treasury Emergency Rental Assistance (ERA) Program 1 (as established by the Consolidated Appropriations Act, 2021) and 2 (as established by section 3201 of the American Rescue Plan Act of 2021), the Palm Beach County Board of County Commissioners (BCC) approved ERA-1 funding to assist Palm Beach County residents affected by COVID-19 with rental and

utility assistance. On August 17th, 2021, the BCC approved ERA-2 funding for the same purpose.

Eligible Palm Beach County households are renter households in which one or more individual(s) meets all of the following criteria:

- For ERA-1, qualifies for unemployment or experienced a reduction of household income, incurred significant costs, or experienced other financial hardships **due to** COVID-19 (either directly or indirectly), or for ERA-2, qualifies for unemployment or experienced other financial hardships **during or due to** (either directly or indirectly) COVID-19;
- Demonstrates a risk of homelessness or housing instability; and
- Has a household income at or below 80% of the area median.

Rental Assistance Applications

The County accepted online applications electronically on the Community Services Online System for Community Access to Resources and Social Services (OSCARSS). OSCARSS required applicants to upload certain supporting documentation, including identification, a rental lease agreement, and a Balance Statement from the landlord. The Balance Statement was to be completed by the applicant's landlord or property manager, and was to reflect the amount of rent owed by the applicant.



The form of the application differed slightly throughout the program, but each included eligibility questions and acknowledgements. Applicants were required to affirm these statements by digitally checking a box next to each one.

Applicant submitted eight applications (No. 28402, 74220, 82438, 85960, 91129, 95011, 98464, and 100545) with the following Acknowledgment section:

- I further certify that I have read² the above information and, to the best of my knowledge and belief, the information is accurate and has been properly recorded. Additionally, I understand that I am responsible for the accuracy of the information provided and that said information will be used as a basis for determining my eligibility for services. **I also understand that any falsification or misrepresentation of this information is just cause for denial of services and prosecution for fraud.**

[Emphasis added]

The final page of the applications required the applicant's name and submission date.

² In the version of this acknowledgment for application 28402, there was a comma after the word "read." The wording in this acknowledgment was identical for all applications.

Community Services assigned applications it received to a Community Services reviewer. The reviewer checked to ensure the application submitted all required information and that there were no discrepancies within the documents. If information was missing, or if information in submitted documents was inconsistent, the reviewer would return the application to the applicant, noting what was missing or inconsistent. If the applicant met the income guidelines, submitted required documentation, and the applicant's landlord had registered or was in the process of registering with the County as a vendor, the reviewer would send the application to a supervisor for review.

Then, applications were sent to Community Services fiscal personnel. Upon the approval of an application for rental assistance, the County sent notice of approval and a request for payment to the County Clerk & Comptroller's Office for payment processing.

Property Appraiser's Records for [REDACTED]

On each of Applicant's rental assistance applications, he listed [REDACTED] as the landlord of his residence at [REDACTED]. The Palm Beach County Property Appraiser's online database shows that [REDACTED] is the owner of the property.

ALLEGATION AND FINDINGS

Allegation (1):

Applicant provided false information to the County in his assistance applications, which resulted in improper grant funding from County programs.

Governing Directives:

Palm Beach County CARES Act - Coronavirus Relief Fund Rental, Utilities, and Food Assistance Program application and program guidelines; Palm Beach County Emergency Rental Assistance Program application and program guidelines.

Finding:

The information obtained **supports** the allegation.

Applicant submitted the following grant applications under the County's CARES Act and ERA Programs:

Application	Date of Initial Application	Date of County Payment	Type of Assistance	Amount	Approved	Letter From Employer Included
1. 28402	08/12/2020	10/29/2020	Food	\$900.00	Yes	No
		10/30/2020	Home Energy	\$293.79	Yes	
		11/30/2020	Rental	\$1,100.00	Yes	
2. 74220	5/12/2021	7/27/2021	Rental	\$1,100.00	Yes	Yes
3. 82438	7/16/2021	7/21/2021	Home Energy	\$185.52	Yes	Yes
4. 85960	8/9/2021	9/2/2021	Rental	\$3,200.00	Yes	Yes
5. 91129	9/13/2021	9/20/2021	Electric	\$227.94	Yes	Yes
6. 95011	10/08/2021	NA	Rental	NA	Deleted	Yes
7. 98464	11/4/2021	NA	Rental	NA	Deleted	Yes
8. 100545	11/09/2021	NA	Rental	NA	No	Yes
Total				\$7,007.25		

Rental, Food and Home Energy Assistance Application 28402

County records show Applicant initially electronically signed and submitted assistance application number 28402 to the County on August 12, 2020. The County returned the application to Applicant on August 25, 2020, September 11, 2020, October 9, 2020, and October 18, 2020 for additional information, including proof of COVID crisis and proof of income prior to COVID. Applicant resubmitted the application on August 25, 2020, October 5, 2020, October 15, 2020, and on October 22, 2020.

Applicant listed his address as [REDACTED] and his monthly rent payment as \$1,050.00. He requested rental assistance for October 2020, for a past due electric bill of \$211.00, and for food assistance. On October 28, 2020, the County processed the application in the amount of \$1,100.00 for rent, \$293.79 for home energy³, and \$900.00⁴ for food assistance, totaling \$2,293.79 in assistance.

³ Though Applicant's application requested \$211.00, this assistance amount was increased by CSD to cover the time period during the application review process.

⁴ Applicant initially received \$400.00 in food assistance for application 28402. He later received an additional \$500.00, totaling \$900.00 in food assistance. According to Community Services, individuals that were eligible for food cards received an automated additional \$500.00 re-load in December of 2020.

Services Requested	
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Electric Bill
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Rental Payment
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Food

Additional Questions - Rental Assistance	
What is the Rent Due Date? *	10/01/2020
What is your Landlord's Name? *	
What is your Landlord's Address? *	
What is your Landlord's Email Address? *	
What is your Landlord's Phone Number? *	
What is your Monthly Rent Amount? *	\$1,050.00
Are you currently receiving section 8 or any federal housing subsidies? *	No
Did you receive a Rental Late or Eviction Notice? *	Yes
Have you received an eviction notice (issued after 3/15/2020) caused by the COVID-19 pandemic? *	No
What is the Rental Past Due Start Date? *	10/01/2020
What is the Rental Past Due End Date? *	10/03/2020
What is the Rental Past Due Amount Requested? *	\$1,050.00

Additional Questions - Home Energy Assistance	
What is the Electric Bill Due Date? *	10/08/2020
What is the Electric Company's Name? *	FLORIDA POWER AND LIGHT (FLOR0703)
What is the Electric Company Account Number? *	
Did you receive an Electric Bill Late Notice? *	Yes
What is the Electric Bill Due Start Date? *	10/08/2020
What is the Electric Bill Due End Date? *	10/09/2020
What is the Electric Bill Due Amount Requested? *	\$211.00

Applicant attested that his crisis was COVID-19 related. In the Declaration of Crisis section of the application, he wrote "Job hours were changed worked one week off one week on." Applicant did not submit a letter from his employer with this application. He did, however, submit a paystub showing 15.5 hours of the 80-hour pay period as "Leave Without Pay."

Declaration of Crisis (Please Explain the reason for your Crisis Situation below): *
Job hours were changed worked one week off one week on

Company:	City of Delray Beach	Name:	[REDACTED]
Address:	100 NW 1st Ave Delray Beach, FL 33444	Employee #:	[REDACTED]
Department:	[REDACTED]	Pay Dates:	09/26/2020 - 10/09/2020

Hours Code		Hours Worked	Gross	Y.T.D. Gross
02-10	OVERTIME STRAIGHT x1	0.0000	0.00	6.88
01-13	AWAY WITH PAY	0.0000	0.00	96.25
01-01	REGULAR FULL TIME	48.0000	685.92	18789.57
85-01	TAX REFUND	0.0000	0.00	26.12
20-02	VACATION USED	8.0000	114.32	816.26
20-04	VACATION EMERGENCY	8.0000	114.32	526.82
02-01	OVERTIME 1.5	0.0000	0.00	159.84
25-02	SICK USED	0.5000	7.15	1218.65
30-02	PERSONAL HOLIDAY USED	0.0000	0.00	110.00
01-04	HOLIDAY	0.0000	0.00	664.32
01-06	LEAVE WITHOUT PAY	15.5000	0.00	0.00
		Gross Pay:	\$921.71	\$22,414.71

Withholdings and Deductions	Gross	Amount	Y.T.D. Amount
ALLST ACCIDENT	0.00	12.42	260.82
BMG LOAN	0.00	122.02	2562.42
CHILD SUPP FEE	0.00	1.50	31.50
CHILD SUPPORT	0.00	102.68	2156.28
FICA	860.50	53.35	1308.40
FT	832.39	19.01	697.43
MC	860.50	12.48	308.00
PEN-GEN	921.71	28.11	677.78
PPO	0.00	48.79	1024.59
SEIU UNION	0.00	16.15	323.00
		NetPay:	\$505.20
		CheckAmount:	0.00

Accrual Hours	Starting Balance	Hours Earned	Hours Taken	Adjustment	Ending Balance
PER-Personal Holiday	0.0000	8.0000	0.0000	0.0000	8.0000
SCK-Sick	0.5000	8.0000	0.5000	0.0000	8.0000
VAC-Vacation	21.8342	9.3334	16.0000	0.0000	15.1676

County Assistance Payments to [REDACTED]

On November 30 2020, the County issued check number 00003215680 in the amount of \$1,100 to [REDACTED] for rental assistance, including a late fee.

 BOARD OF COUNTY PALM BEACH COUNTY WEST PALM BEACH, FLORIDA		64-975/612 WELLS FARGO BANK, N.A.	CHECK NO. 00003215684 DATE 11/30/2020
PAY TO THE ORDER OF [REDACTED]		AMOUNT *****1,100.00	
One Thousand One Hundred And 00/100 Dollars			
[REDACTED]			
[REDACTED]			
Seq: 97 Batch: 662663 Date: 12/07/20			
1371253			

In addition, County records show a payment to Florida Power and Light (FPL) on October 30, 2020 in the amount of \$293.79⁵ and a food card payment to Applicant in the amount of \$400.00⁶ on October 29, 2020.

Rental Assistance Application 74220

County Records show Applicant originally electronically signed and submitted application number 74220 to the County on May 12, 2021. He listed his address as [REDACTED] and his monthly rent payment as \$1,050.00. He requested assistance for May through July, 2021.

On May 14, 2021, the County returned the application and requested additional information. Specifically, the County requested that Applicant

. . . upload proof of COVID-19 Financial Crisis: one paystub for February or March 2020 and all paystubs for March and April 2021 showing reduced hours or a current letter from your employer stating that reduced hours were due to COVID-19 or any verifiable document that shows a loss income due to COVID-19. . .

Applicant resubmitted the application on May 26, 2021. The County again returned the application to Applicant that same date, requesting additional information, including paystubs showing that his hours had been reduced. Applicant resubmitted the application on May 27, 2021. The County again returned the application to him that same date, requesting that he provide proof that his loss of income was due to COVID-19. On June 3, 2021, Applicant resubmitted the application, and the County processed the application on July 26, 2021. The Balance Statement submitted with the application was dated July 14, 2021 and showed a total of \$1,100.00 in past due rent, which included a late fee of \$50.00 for July of 2021.

Employer Letter submitted with Application 74220

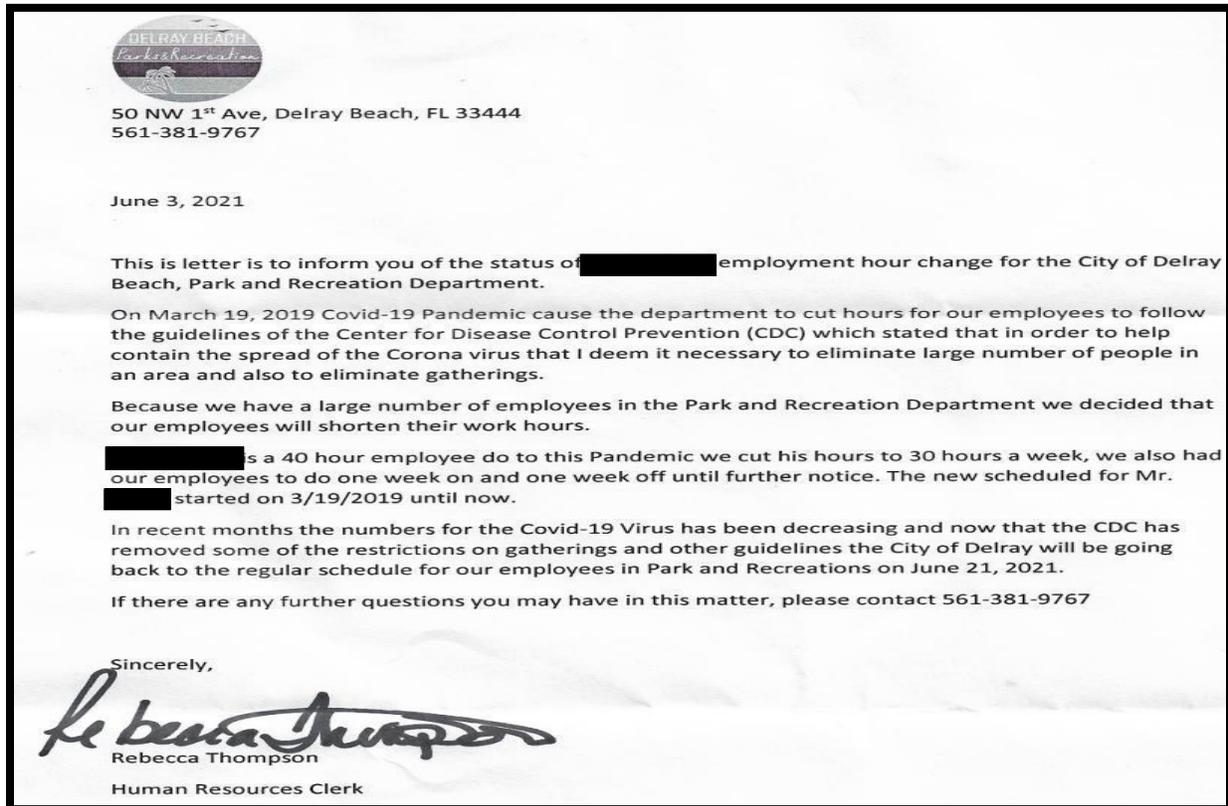
The County requested that Applicant submit “a current letter from your employer stating that reduced hours were due to COVID-19 or any verifiable document that shows a loss income due to COVID-19”. Applicant submitted a letter dated June 3, 2021 displaying a City of Delray Beach Parks and Recreation logo to the County. The letter purported to be signed by Rebecca Thompson, Human Resources Clerk. The letter stated, in part,

. . . we decided that our employees will shorten their work hours.

⁵ The County made this payment of \$293.79 via check 3209653. The check was in the amount of \$56,587.00 and was a collective payment made to FPL for several assistance applications.

⁶ In addition to the \$400.00 Applicant received for application 28402, he also received an additional \$500.00 totaling \$900.00 in food assistance. According to Community Services, individuals that were eligible for food cards received an automated additional \$500.00 re-load in December of 2020.

█ Applicant is a 40 hour employee do [sic] to this Pandemic we cut his hours to 30 hours a week, we also had our employees to do one week on and one week off until further notice. The new scheduled [sic] for Applicant started on 3/19/2019 until now. . .

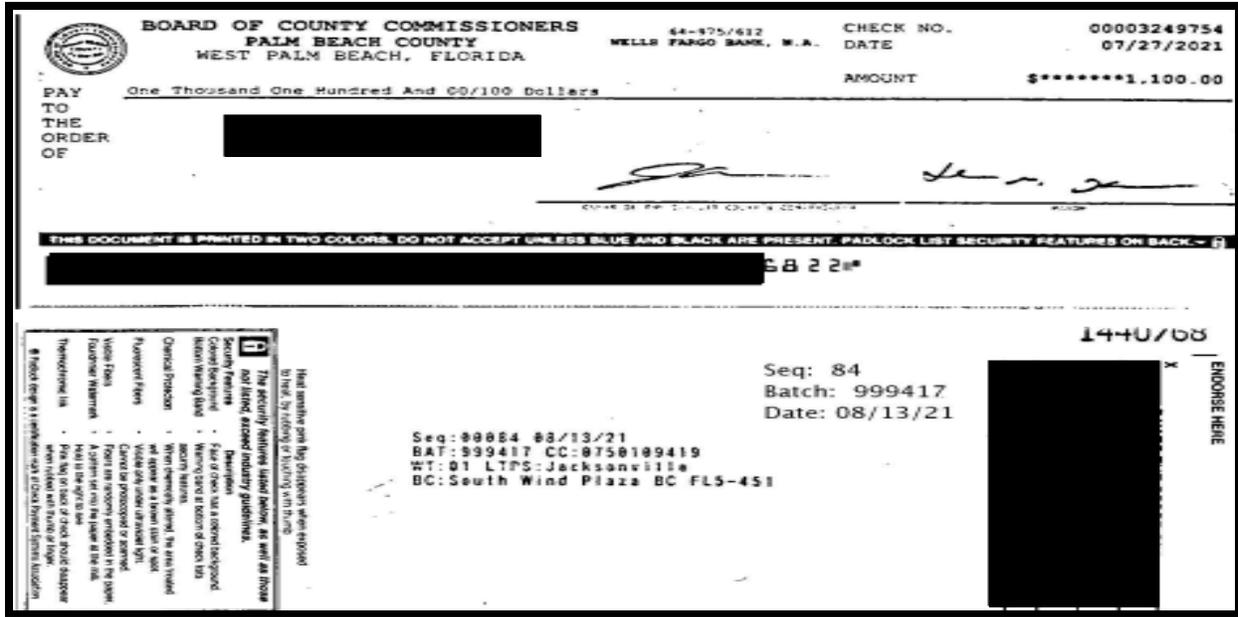


The letter also stated, "If there are any further questions you may have in this matter, please contact 561-381-9767."

Applicant certified that all documents he provided were accurate when he electronically signed and submitted his rental assistance application.

Payment to █

On July 27, 2021, the County issued check number 00003249754 in the amount of \$1,100.00, including a late fee, to █ for rental assistance.



Home Energy Assistance Application 82438

County records show Applicant electronically signed and submitted assistance application 82438 on July 16, 2021, requesting that the County pay his past due electric bill in the amount of \$191.00. Applicant attested that his crisis was COVID-19 related, and listed the reason for his crisis situation as “In need of my light bill paid, do [sic] to all monies being exhausted, currently getting help from community action.” The County issued a payment to Florida Power & Light Co in the amount of \$185.52⁷ on July 21, 2021.

Employer Letter submitted with Application 82438

In support of application 82438, Applicant submitted to the County the same letter dated June 3, 2021 purporting to be from his employer that he submitted with application 74220.

Applicant certified that all documents he provided were accurate when he electronically signed and submitted his rental assistance application.

Rental Assistance Application 85960

County records show Applicant electronically signed and submitted application 85960 to the County on August 9, 2021. He listed his address as [REDACTED] and his monthly rent payment as \$1,050.00. He requested assistance for August through October, 2021.

⁷ The County made this FPL payment via check 3248776. The check was in the amount of \$12,516.93 and was a collective payment made to FPL for several assistance applications.

Applicant attested that his crisis was COVID-19 related. In the Declaration of Crisis section of the application, he wrote:

Due to the increase in cases regarding the COVID-19 virus from July 2021 employer decided to continue with the decrease in hours worked and the number of employees working, this will affect my income drastically, this has been intact since March 19, 2019, and will continue until at least until the end of the year.

The County approved the application on September 1, 2021.

Employer Letter submitted with Application 85960

Applicant submitted with this application to the County a letter dated August 3, 2021 displaying a City of Delray Beach Parks and Recreation logo. This letter again was purported to be signed by Rebecca Thompson, Human Resources Clerk. The letter stated, in part,

This letter is to inform you of the status of [REDACTED] Applicant [sic] employment hour change... [REDACTED] Applicant is a 40 hour employee do [sic] to this Pandemic we cut his hours to 32 hours a week. The new scheduled [sic] for Applicant started on 3/19/2019 and updated as of 6/28/21 to the new hours per week listed above...

This letter provided the same contact phone number for additional information as the letter Applicant submitted with applications 74220 and 82438.



50 NW 1st Ave, Delray Beach, FL 33444
561-381-9767

August 3, 2021

This letter is to inform you of the status of [REDACTED] employment hour change for the City of Delray Beach, Park and Recreation Department.

On March 19, 2019 Covid-19 Pandemic cause the department to cut hours for our employees to follow the guidelines of the Center for Disease Control Prevention (CDC) which stated that in order to help contain the spread of the Corona virus that It has been deem necessary to eliminate large number of people in an area and also to eliminate gatherings.

Because we have a large number of employees in the Park and Recreation Department we decided that our employees will shorten their work hours.

[REDACTED] is a 40 hour employee do to this Pandemic we cut his hours to 32 hours a week. The new scheduled for Mr. Paulk started on 3/19/2019 and updated as of 6/28/21 to the new hours per week listed above.

In recent months the numbers for the Covid-19 Virus has been increasing and the City of Delray will be extending the restrictions for our employees in Park and Recreations until further notice.

If there are any further questions you may have in this matter, please contact 561-381-9767

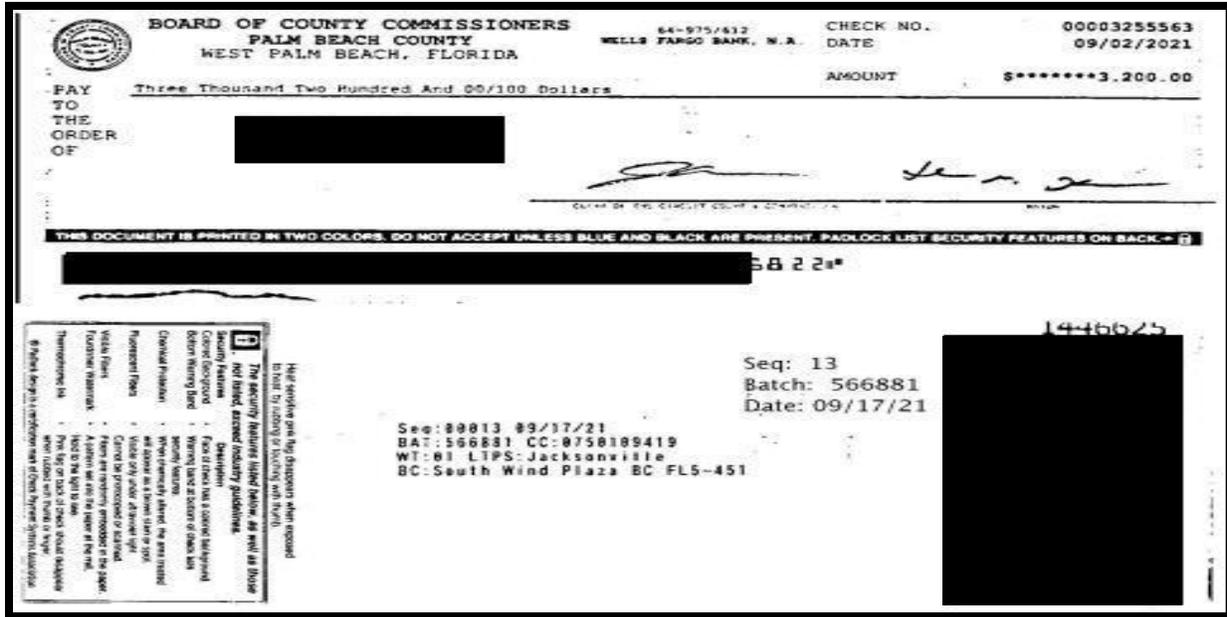
Sincerely,

Rebecca Thompson
Human Resources Clerk

Applicant certified that all documents he provided were accurate when he electronically signed and submitted his rental assistance application.

Payment to [REDACTED]

On September 2, 2021, the County issued check number 00003255563 in the amount of \$3,200.00 to "[REDACTED]" for rental assistance.



Home Energy Assistance Application 91129

County records show Applicant electronically signed and submitted assistance application 91129 on September 13, 2021, requesting that the County pay his past due electric bill in the amount of \$233.00. Applicant attested that his crisis was COVID-19 related, and listed the reason for his crisis situation as “Due to increase in other bills and income covid having a impact on my pay I need help with my light bill.” The County processed this application on September 17, 2021 and issued a payment to Florida Power & Light Co in the amount of \$227.94⁸ on September 20, 2021.

Employer Letter submitted with Application 91129

In support of application 91129, Applicant submitted to the County the same letter dated August 3, 2021, purporting to be from his employer that he submitted with application 85960.

Rental Assistance Application 95011

County records show Applicant electronically signed and submitted application 95011 to the County on October 8, 2021. He listed his address as [REDACTED] and his monthly rent payment as \$1,050.00. He requested assistance for November 2021 through January 2022.

Applicant attested that his crisis was COVID-19 related. In the Declaration of Crisis section of the application, he wrote,

⁸ The County made this payment via check 3257556. The check was in the amount of \$47,081.26 and was a collective payment made to FPL for several assistance applications.

Since the pandemic, my expenses have increased and my income has changed considerably, need help to get back on my feet until next year when the hours at my job have gone back to regular hours.

On October 8, 2021, Community Services returned the application to Applicant, stating, "Requesting future months so please remove late fee charges... Requesting proof of covid crisis. Client is still working above the hourly amount that letter restriction shows." Applicant resubmitted the application that same date. Additionally, on October 8, 2021, Community Services returned the application to Applicant twice, noting, "Requesting proof of increase in expenses and past due rent notice." Applicant resubmitted the application after it was returned the first time, but deleted it on November 4, 2021 after Community Services returned it the second time.

Rental Assistance Application 98464

County records show Applicant electronically signed and submitted application 98464 to the County on November 4, 2021. He listed his address as [REDACTED] and his monthly rent payment as \$1,050.00. He requested assistance for November 2021 through January 2022.

Applicant attested that his crisis was COVID-19 related. In the Declaration of Crisis section of the application, he wrote,

Since the pandemic, my hours at work have been sporadic at best. I work about 35 hours a week instead of 40 hrs a week, and I haven't been able to pay the rent as requested. Hopefully, knowing that the numbers are going down, I will spend my rent again next year.

On November 4, 2021, Community Services returned the application to Applicant, stating, "Please upload 2 check stubs under proof of crisis section of the application before March 2020 Jan and or February showing income before decrease." Applicant resubmitted the application that same date. On that same day, Community Services returned the application to Applicant, stating, "Please upload your signed social security card. And before you resubmit please make sure that 4 recent check stubs uploaded show the decrease in income." Applicant deleted the application on November 4, 2021.

Rental Assistance Application 100545

County records show Applicant electronically signed and submitted application 100545 on November 9, 2021. He listed his address as [REDACTED], and his monthly rent payment as \$1,050.00. He requested assistance for November 2021 through January 2022.

Applicant attested that his crisis was COVID-19 related, and listed the reason for his crisis situation as, "Income decreased from March 2020 until recent 10/29 due to a decrease in hours at work..."

On December 3, 2021, Community Services noted in the application's OSCARSS Routing Log, "... **Verified with his employer, City of Delray Beach-HR Dorothy Bast, that the letters written regarding his reduction in pay were not from an employee in their offices. Additionally, the applicant did not have a reduction in pay. He has always had poor attendance.**" The County denied the application the same day, noting the denial reason as "Invalid Documents... The Proof of COVID crisis criteria was not meet [sic]."

The OSCARSS Routing Log shows that on that same day, Applicant submitted an appeal request, stating,

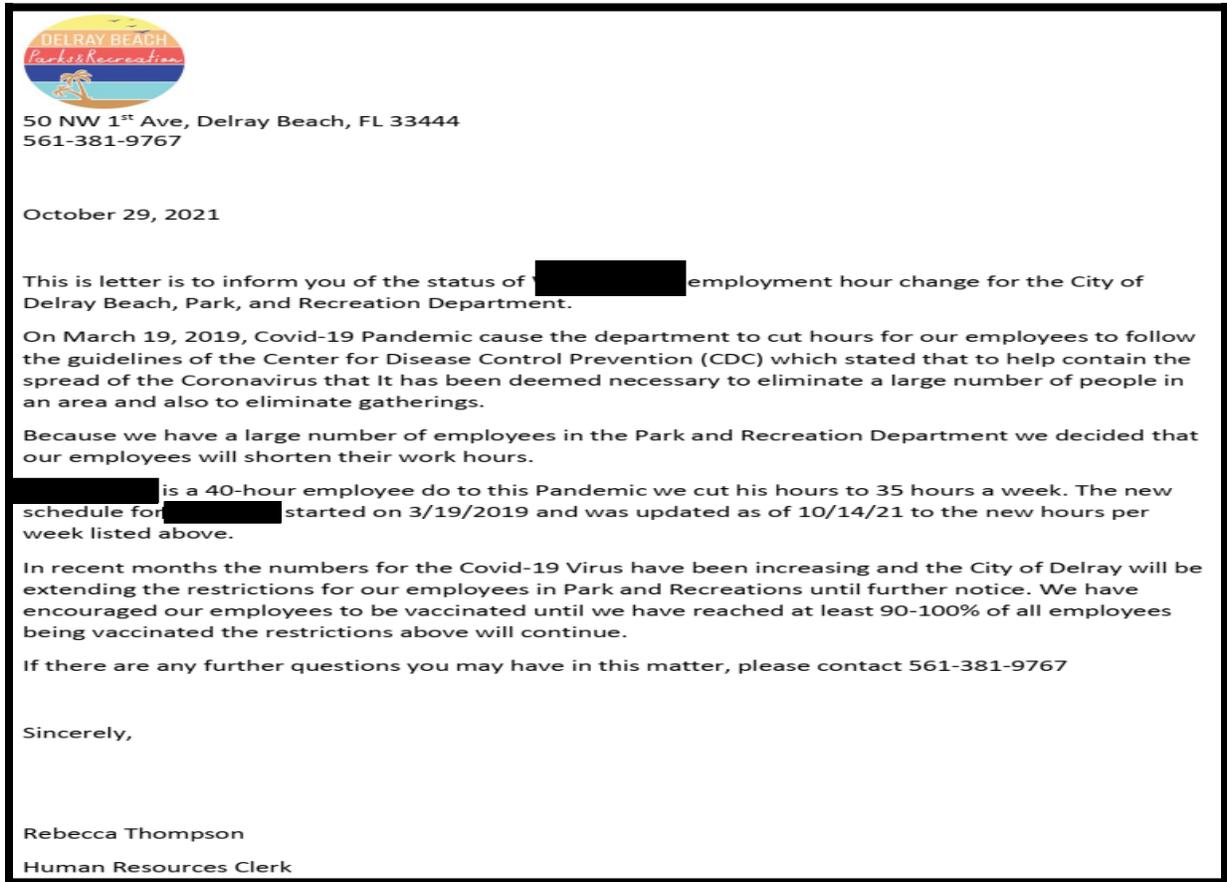
I sent the information pretaining [sic] the reason for me not being able to pay the rent due to the fact that my hours had been adjusted due to the COVID pandemic and that I was only working 32 hrs out [sic] 40 hrs a week. The [sic] information I submitted had not changed since I requested help back in August. I would like for my application to be evaluated. I am now in a bend [sic] and may be evicted due to November rent not being paid.

Employer Letter submitted with Application 100545

Along with this application, Applicant submitted a letter dated October 29, 2021 to the County with a City of Delray Beach Parks and Recreation logo. This letter purported to be signed by "Rebecca Thompson, Human Resources Clerk." The letter stated, in part,

This is [sic] letter is to inform you of the status of [REDACTED] Applicant's employment hour change... [REDACTED] Applicant is a 40-hour employee do [sic] to this Pandemic we cut his hours to 35 hours a week. The new schedule for Applicant started on 3/19/2019 and was updated as of 10/14/21 to the new hours per week listed above...

This notice provided the same contact number for additional information as the letters Applicant previously submitted.



City of Delray Beach Human Resources Department Employees

The OIG reviewed a list of Delray Beach Human Resources Department employees on the City's website. No individual matched the name Rebecca Thompson or "Pat."⁹

OIG Interview of City of Delray Beach Assistant HR Director Dorothy Bast

Assistant Human Resources Director Dorothy Bast told the OIG that the letters Applicant submitted with his County applications purportedly from HR were not issued by the HR Department. In addition, she said the City does not have an employee by the name of Rebecca Thompson and HR does not have a title "Human Resources Clerk." Ms. Bast also stated that all HR phone numbers begin with the prefix 243, not 381 as stated in the letters Applicant submitted with his applications.

Ms. Bast told the OIG that Applicant's hours were not reduced at any time. She explained that employees are required to work 80 hours per two-week pay period, but can take days off upon request. However, Applicant has had issues with unauthorized absences from work, and he does not always have paid leave, which has resulted in "Leave without Pay"

⁹ In his interview with the OIG, Applicant referred to a Human Resources employee named "Pat."

on his pay statements. Therefore, she said his “Regular Full Time” hours will not always show 80 hours in a pay period.

Ms. Bast confirmed that the list of HR Department employees on the City’s website was an accurate list of all employees who had been with the HR Department since March of 2020. In addition, Ms. Bast told the OIG that no HR department employee has been named “Pat” since March of 2020.

Interview of Applicant

Applicant told the OIG he applied for assistance for several reasons, one of which was because his employer started a one week on, one week off work schedule. He said the new schedule caused him to lose hours and make less money per pay period.

Applicant reviewed pay statements with the OIG. He stated the section labeled “Regular Full Time” showed the number of hours worked in the week “on,” and that if the hours were over 40 it indicated that the City allowed overtime. Applicant said he used his vacation time to make up for missed time within pay periods, which showed under “Vacation Used.” If he did not have vacation hours to cover the week “off,” then the remaining time in the pay period would show under “Leave Without Pay.” Applicant said the one week on, one week off schedule lasted two months, beginning in March of 2020.

Applicant said he received the employer letters that he submitted with his County applications from “Ms. Pat” who was a Secretary in the Delray Beach Human Resources Department. Applicant initially told the OIG that Ms. Thompson was in the Human Resources Department, but he later said that he never met her and is not sure if she still works for Delray Beach Human Resources.

When the OIG told Applicant that according to the Assistant HR Director the letters did not come from HR and there was no employee by the name of Rebecca Thompson that has ever worked for the HR Department, Applicant responded, “That’s new to me.” He then reiterated that he received the letters from “Ms. Pat” and he believed that the letters came from Dot Bast or Rebecca Thompson.

Applicant explained he was not aware he was getting paid the full 80 hours per pay period. He said his hours were reduced and that his pay statements do not show that he was being paid 80 hours per pay period.

Interview of City of Delray Beach Employee

During his OIG interview, Applicant identified an individual whom he stated could attest to Delray Beach Parks and Recreation Department’s one week on, one week off schedule during the pandemic. The OIG interviewed the individual Applicant referred to the OIG. He identified himself as a City of Delray Beach Parks and Recreation Department employee during the pandemic with personal knowledge of the Department’s work arrangement. The OIG verified his employment with the City for the period relevant to this

matter. This individual told the OIG that in an attempt to prevent the spread of COVID-19, the Parks and Recreation Department employees worked a one week on, one week off work schedule. He stated that an employee working the one week on, one week off work schedule was paid for a full 80 hours of work every pay period. On the week an employee was considered off, that employee was on-call.

Conclusion

Applicant submitted eight COVID-19 related assistance applications. On each occasion, he attested that he provided accurate information to the County. Based upon our review of the documents and the statements of Applicant's employer, we found that the employment letters Applicant submitted to the County in support of his applications were fabricated. In addition, we found his statements to the County concerning his hours worked to be misleading and untrue.

As a result of the false and misleading information Applicant provided in five of his applications, the County issued payments totaling \$7,007.25. Applicant also attempted to collect County funds based on his submission of three additional applications, two of which he ultimately deleted, and one of which the County denied.

The allegation that Applicant provided false information in his assistance applications is **supported**.

IDENTIFIED, QUESTIONED, AND AVOIDABLE COSTS

Identified Costs: \$7,007.25

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

The Inspector General's Investigations Division would like to thank the Palm Beach County Community Services Department staff for their cooperation throughout this investigation.

RECOMMENDED CORRECTIVE ACTIONS

The OIG recommends that the County seek reimbursement of \$7,007.25 of inappropriately issued funds.

RESPONSE FROM MANAGEMENT

Pursuant to Article XII, Section 2-427 of the Palm Beach County Code, Community Services was provided the opportunity to submit a written explanation or rebuttal to the findings as stated in this Investigative Report within ten (10) calendar days. Their written response is as follows:

The County concurs with the IG recommendation included in Investigative Report 2022-0009. The Community Services Department will seek reimbursement of the \$7,007.25 issued to the subject named in this investigation.

RESPONSE FROM SUBJECT

Pursuant to Article XII, Section 2-427 of the Palm Beach County Code, Willie Applicant was provided the opportunity to submit a written explanation or rebuttal to the finding as stated in the Investigative Report within ten (10) calendar days. Applicant did not submit a response.

This Investigation has been conducted in accordance with the ASSOCIATION OF INSPECTORS GENERAL Principles & Quality Standards for Investigations.