



OFFICE OF THE COUNTY AUDITOR

Craig Glendenning, CPA
County Auditor

February 14, 2023

The Honorable Members of the County Council
The Honorable Calvin Ball, County Executive

Our Office received allegations regarding the misuse of the Howard County Library System's (HCLS) facilities. Pursuant to Section 213 of the Howard County Charter, "the Council may at any time order the examination or audit of the accounts of any department, office or agency receiving funds from the County Government." The County Solicitor advised us that an order under Section 213 authorizes an audit or examination of the HCLS' records that contain information that is relevant to the allegations. The Council ordered and authorized our Office to conduct the aforementioned examination/investigation.

We were unable to conduct the examination/investigation of the allegations because of an inability to obtain HCLS' unrestricted cooperation. The examination/investigation was terminated and as a result we were unable to conclude whether the allegations are substantiated or unsubstantiated. This report details the allegations and the steps we have taken to date.

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cc: Brandee Ganz, Acting Chief Administrative Officer
Gary Kuc, County Solicitor
Antonia B. Watts, Chair, Library Board of Trustees
Phillip Dodge, Vice Chair, Library Board of Trustees
Kelly L. Smith, Treasurer, Library Board of Trustees
Elizabeth Banach, Member, Library Board of Trustees
Robert Mentz, Member, Library Board of Trustees
Julie Parham, Member, Library Board of Trustees
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BACKGROUND

On October 4, 2022, our Office received allegations that were submitted through the County's Fraud, Waste, and Abuse Online Submission Form. The complainant alleged that the President and Chief Executive Officer (CEO) of the Howard County Library System (HCLS), was hosting a "Partnership Event" on October 7, 2022. The complainant noted that "this event originally started as a personal gathering for her [the President and CEO] college sorority sisters but was recast due to negative optics."

The complainant further noted that the "purpose of the event remains the same [personal gathering for college sorority sisters] and the cost for County staff support and time is being carried out by Howard County taxes." The complainant felt that there were "no other benefits to the County other than [the President and CEO's] personal benefit."

Howard County taxpayers provide the resources necessary to fund HCLS operations. Our responsibility is to ensure that these taxpayer dollars are being spent appropriately. In the County's Fiscal Year 2023 Approved Operating Budget, HCLS received a \$24 million General Fund appropriation to support its operations, which included funding for 245.5 personnel positions. In addition, the County approved a \$3.6 million appropriation for debt service on behalf of HCLS. According to HCLS' Fiscal Year 2022 Annual Report, the County provided 89 percent of its total operating revenues.

FINDINGS AND CONCLUSION

Upon performing initial research, we concluded that sufficient evidence existed to warrant a formal examination/investigation into potential misuse of HCLS' facilities and resources. However, although the County Council ordered our Office to officially examine/investigate the allegations (given the County Solicitor's opinion that the County Charter provided us with the authority to perform such an examination/investigation), we were forced to terminate the examination/investigation after the intervention of the HCLS Board of Trustees' Chair (Board Chair).

The amount of resistance that we encountered from HCLS management and the Board Chair throughout our examination/investigation process has raised several red flags and heightened our level of professional skepticism as we have numerous questions that remain unanswered.

This matter has been referred to the State of Maryland for follow up.

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