



CHIEF FINANCIAL OFFICER
JIMMY PATRONIS
STATE OF FLORIDA

July 24, 2019

The Honorable Tara S. Green
Clerk of Circuit Court
Clay County
825 North Orange Avenue
Green Cove Springs, Florida 32043

Dear Ms. Green:

We completed our Article V Clerk of the Circuit Court Expenditure Compliance Audit in accordance with Florida Statutes. Enclosed is a copy of our final report.

We appreciate your advanced preparation for our audit and the courtesy extended to our team. We look forward to working with your office in the future.

Please contact Kim Holland at (850) 413-5700 or kim.holland@myfloridacfo.com if you have any questions.

Sincerely,

A black rectangular redaction box covering the signature area.

Mark Merry

MM/jp

Enclosure



**JIMMY PATRONIS
CHIEF FINANCIAL OFFICER
STATE OF FLORIDA**

Florida Department of Financial Services

**CLAY COUNTY
CLERK OF THE CIRCUIT COURT
COMPLIANCE AUDIT**

**Report No. 2019-41
July 24, 2019**

SUMMARY

The Department of Financial Services (DFS) has completed an audit of the Clay County Clerk of the Circuit Court.¹ The auditors sampled court-related administrative and payroll expenditure accounts and transactions to determine whether, in making such expenditures, the Clerk's office complied with applicable State laws.² The sampled Clerk's office administrative and payroll expenditures generally complied with applicable State laws, and funds were expended for allowable court-related costs. However, as further described in the Observations and Recommendations section, we noted:

- In two (2) instances, the expenditures had been improperly allocated as court-related costs or were not authorized of record as being a reasonable administrative support cost.

BACKGROUND

In 2013, the Florida Legislature passed legislation that removed the Clerks of the Circuit Courts from the State appropriations process.³ The 2013 legislation requires that all court-related functions must be funded from filing fees, service charges, costs, and fines retained by the Clerks. That portion of all fines, fees, service charges, and costs collected by the Clerks for the previous month that exceeds one-twelfth (1/12) of a Clerk's total budget must be remitted to the State. Those funds are deposited into the State of Florida's Clerk of the Court Trust Fund. For those Clerks who collect less than their approved budgets, the shortage is disbursed from the Clerks of the Court Trust Fund. In addition, the DFS' role was changed to providing audits of only the Clerks' court-related expenditures.

The organization that governs the Clerks, the Florida Clerks of Court Operations Corporation (CCOC), was initially formed to review and certify proposed budgets from each Clerk. In 2017, the Florida Legislature passed new legislation⁴ giving the CCOC the duty of approving the proposed budgets submitted by the Clerks of the Circuit Courts as required by State law.⁵ The 2017 legislation provides that the CCOC must ensure that the total combined budgets of the Clerks of the Circuit Courts do not exceed the total estimated revenues available for court-related expenditures as determined by the most recent Revenue Estimating Conference.

¹Section 34.031, Florida Statutes.

²Sections 28.35(3)(a) and 28.37(5), Florida Statutes.

³Chapter 2013-44, Laws of Florida.

⁴Chapter 2017-126, Laws of Florida.

⁵Section 28.36, Florida Statutes.

The Chief Financial Officer has contracted with the CCOC to establish a process for auditing the court-related expenditures of the individual Clerks pursuant to State law.⁶ The audits are conducted by the DFS Bureau of Auditing, Article V section. It is the practice of the Department to conduct these audits every three to five years.

SCOPE

The audit of the Clay County Clerk of the Circuit Court's Office covered County Fiscal Year (CFY) 16-17, CFY 17-18, and CFY 18-19 (through March 31, 2019). The audit included both a desk review for analysis and sample selection and an on-site visit for review of supporting documentation.

OBJECTIVES & METHODOLOGIES

The following objectives have been established for the audit of court-related expenditures:

- Evaluate whether court-related expenditures were in compliance with State laws.⁷
- Evaluate whether court-related expenditures were properly authorized, recorded, and supported.
- Evaluate whether the Clerk used other funding sources (from the County or any of the 10% of fines from the Modernization Trust Fund (TF)) to subsidize the court-related budget and/or expenditures (prior to July 1, 2017).
- Evaluate whether expenditures were within the budgeted appropriations.
- Evaluate the accuracy and completeness of expenditures reported on the Clerk of Court Expenditure and Collections Report.
- Evaluate whether the Clerk's salary and total payroll costs were within the applicable caps established by the Florida Legislature's Office of Economic and Demographic Research.
- Evaluate the Clerk's methodology for allocating payroll costs between court and non-court related functions.

Our audit included an examination of accounts, records and the sampling of various court-related transactions related to administrative, and payroll expenditures.

Table 1 shows the court-related budgeted and actual expenditures for each fiscal year reviewed. Source: CCOC Budget Letter and Expenditure and Collection (EC) reports. CFY 16-17 includes juror expenditures through June 2017. CFY 17-18 and CFY 18-19 (through March 31, 2019) do not include juror expenditures.

Table 1

Year	Budgeted	Actual
CFY 16-17	\$3,214,943	\$3,061,284
CFY 17-18	\$3,054,471	\$3,054,471
CFY 18-19	\$3,171,152	\$1,341,140 ⁸

The Clay County Clerk of the Circuit Court serves a population of 208,549.⁹

The budgeted growth from October 2016 through September 2019 was -1.36%.

⁶Section 28.35(2)(e), Florida Statutes.

⁷Sections 28.35(3)(a) and 28.37(5), Florida Statutes.

⁸Actual through March 31, 2019.

⁹The Florida Legislature's Office of Economic and Demographic Research Report Salaries of Elected County Constitutional Officers and School District Officials for Fiscal Year 2018-2019, September 2018.

Table 2 reflects the budgeted and actual full-time equivalent (FTE) positions, who charge either all or a portion of employee time to court-related duties. The budgeted number of FTEs includes vacant positions. The actual number of FTEs includes only filled positions.

Table 2

Year	Budgeted FTEs	Actual FTEs
CFY 16-17	74.99	61.47
CFY 17-18	60.02	59.35
CFY 18-19	59.91	55.99 ¹⁰

The budgeted FTEs decreased by -20.11% for the period October 2016 through September 2019.

OBSERVATIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Section (s.) 28.35(3)(a), Florida Statutes (F.S.), outlines the list of court-related functions that Clerks may fund from filing fees, service charges, costs, and fines and is limited to those functions expressly authorized by law or court rule. Those functions include the following: case maintenance; records management; court preparation and attendance; processing the assignment, reopening, and reassignment of cases; processing of appeals; collection and distribution of fines, fees, service charges, and court costs; processing of bond forfeiture payments; payment of jurors and witnesses (before July 1, 2017); payment of expenses for meals or lodging provided to jurors (before July 1, 2017); data collection and reporting; processing of jurors (before July 1, 2017); determinations of indigent status; and paying reasonable administrative support costs to enable the Clerk of the court to carry out these court-related functions.

The list of court-related functions that Clerks may not fund from filing fees, service charges, costs, and fines include:

- Those functions not specified above,
- Functions assigned by administrative orders which are not required for the Clerk to perform the functions above,
- Enhanced levels of service which are not required for the Clerk to perform the functions above, and
- Functions identified as local requirements in law or local optional programs.

During our testing of the Clerk's office administrative expenditures, we noted two (2) instances in which the expenditure, contrary to statutory guidance, had been allocated as a court cost, or was not authorized of record as a reasonable administrative support cost.

- In CFY 16-17, the Clerk's office purchased subscriptions to The Florida Bar Journal and The Florida Bar News for \$220 as a resource for articles on Florida law and for statewide news on law related issues.
- In CFY 17-18, the Clerk's office purchased a pack of assorted birthday cards for \$110 to recognize employee's birthdays of which \$92 was allocated to the court.

We recommend the Clerk's office ensure that its court-related expenditures are allowable according to s. 28.35(3)(a), F.S. We also recommend that the Clerk's office reimburse the State for \$312 for the expenditures noted above.

¹⁰Actual through March 31, 2019.



TARA S. GREEN

Clerk of the Circuit Court, Clay County

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Mr. Mark Merry
Assistant Division Director
Florida Department of Financial Services
Division of Accounting and Auditing

Re: Compliance Audit Dated July 24, 2019

Dear Mr. Merry:

In reference to the above mentioned audit report for the Clay County Clerk of the Circuit Court, for the fiscal years ended 2017, 2018 and six months of fiscal 2019, I concur with the findings and the office will reimburse the Clerk of the Court Trust Fund in the amount of \$312.

Sincerely,

Tara S. Green
Clerk of Court
Clay County, Florida

