Inspector General Department

Investigative Report
Alleged Favoritism

Tamera Anderson, Chief Internal Audit Officer/Inspector General

Inspector General Department
Investigative Report
Alleged Favoritism

To: The Honorable Kevin Karnes, Lee County Clerk of the Circuit Court & Comptroller
From: Tamera Anderson, Chief Internal Audit Officer/Inspector General
Date: March 31, 2025
Subject: Case File #2025.02, Investigation of Alleged Favoritism

Dear Mr. Karnes:

The Lee County Clerk of the Circuit Court & Comptroller (LCCC), Inspector General (IG) Department received allegations of potential fraud, waste, and abuse. The Chief Records Officer received an email from an anonymous source, and forwarded the email to the IG Department. The Anonymous Complainant alleged favoritism by Management was occurring in the Recording Department (Official and County Records).

Omar Costa, CPA, MAcc, CIGI, Deputy Inspector General and Sarah Arnold, CIGI, CGI, Inspector General Investigator conducted the investigation.

This investigation focused on the allegation(s) of favoritism by Management within the department.

The investigation results were supported by:

- Review of the following LCCC Policies:
  - Policy **306 – Ethics**
  - Policy **412 – Performance Appraisals**
  - Policy **413 - Vacant and Available Positions**
  - Policy **801 – Corrective Action**
  - Policy **901 – Fraud, Waste and Abuse**
- Employee files; personnel records
- Employee evaluations
- Data analytics derived from:
  - Q-Flow
  - VistaHRMS
  - LandMark
- Additional systems reviewed
  - Kronos
  - OnBase
  - I:Drive
  - ClerkNet
- Email correspondence
- Other supporting records

- Interviews of Witnesses
  - Fifteen current employees
  - Five former employees
  - Clerk HR employees
- Interviews of the three Subjects

This investigation conforms to the Association of Inspectors General (AIG) *Principles and Standards for Offices of Inspector General (Green Book)*.

This report will be posted to the Lee County Clerk of Court's website www.leeclerk.org under Inspector General Investigations. A link to the report has been sent to appropriate parties.

The Subject's response (if received) is attached to this report.

The Clerk's response is attached to this report.

Should you have any questions, please do not hesitate to contact me.

Sincerely,

Tamera Anderson, CIG, CIGA, CIGI, CGAP, CGI
Chief Internal Audit Officer/Inspector General
Inspector General Department
OC/GK

Inspector General Department
Investigative Report
Alleged Favoritism

Table of Contents

Inspector General Department
Investigative Report
Alleged Favoritism

Introduction

The Lee County Clerk of Circuit Court & Comptroller (LCCC), Inspector General (IG) Department received allegations of potential fraud, waste, and abuse regarding the Subjects, Eileen Gabrick, Department Manager, Bryan Platten, and Lisa Esposito, Department Supervisors. The complaint alleged favoritism by Management in the Recording Department (Official and County Records). Upon receipt of the anonymous complaint, the IG Department conducted a preliminary review of the allegation(s) to determine jurisdiction, legal sufficiency, and the probability that the alleged acts could have occurred. An investigation was conducted into the allegations provided by the Complainant. This investigation conforms to the Association of Inspectors General (AIG) Principles and Standards for Offices of Inspector General (Green Book).

Allegations

The anonymous complaint received on July 11, 2024 alleged (See Exhibit A):

"This department is based off of favoritism and who you orchestrate with outside of work, which is very unfair to the individuals that choose to work and not interact outside the workplace."

"Evaluations have been fabricated in many different ways"

"I, as well as others, have been overlooked when it comes to certain trainings as we aren't good enough. "You have clerks that weren't fully trained in the basics at the time taking on bigger tasks that they had no business advancing to.

"I have witnessed and watched clerks neglect customers and job duties to take on special projects like cutting out and coloring papers during business hours."

"I have watched clerks make numerous accounting mistakes, drawer mistakes, simple mistakes and advanced mistakes. I have watched and noticed that only certain (minorities) clerks are reprimanded for those same exact mistakes."

"I have noticed that upper management like Eileen, Bryan and especially Lisa Esposito give these individuals these additional small tasks to cover there tracks. But this doesn't make up for the task that they were hired to do and are failing to do."

Inspector General Department
Investigative Report
Alleged Favoritism

Background

The LCCC IG Department received allegations of favoritism. To determine whether the allegations could be substantiated, we conducted interviews, examined records and reviewed the following LCCC Policies.

306 – Ethics: *"The Clerk's office requires all employees to demonstrate the highest standards of personal and professional integrity, truthfulness, honesty and fortitude in all our activities in order to maintain public confidence and trust." "Engage in conduct or take any action which would violate professional ethics or give the appearance of professional impropriety."*

412 – Performance Appraisals: *"Pay for Performance – Is an increase in salary to reward the most productive and the highest-performing employees. Compensating employees based on performance during the year will be a percentage range approved by the Clerk."*

413 – Vacant and Available Positions: *"It is the Clerk's intention to fill a position vacancy with the most qualified candidate based upon the education, experience, certification, knowledge, skills, and abilities as outlined within the job description."*

The hiring Manager can recommend to the Chief Officer and the Human Resources Department, one of 3 options outlined below.

- *Option 1 – Formally post the position(s) in an internal or external manner, giving all interested candidates an opportunity to apply, subject to a formal interview process.*
- *Option 2 – Promote an existing team member into the role(s); subject to the provisions of Policy 505.*
- *Option 3 – Outsource the position(s) and/or workload to a third-party contractor or vendor, subject to the approval of the Clerk."*

"All interested candidates must complete an online application for any formally posted position and follow the standard hiring process. Applying for a position does not guarantee an interview.

Employees that apply for an internal position vacancy must fulfil the minimum term of employment listed within their current job description or 1 total year in the employee's current position. However, this provision may be waived with written approval from the Clerk. "

801 – Corrective Action: *"The Clerk expects employees to perform their jobs at or above a satisfactory level, to render prompt, courteous, and efficient service, to conduct themselves in accordance with established policies, to follow generally accepted standards of business behavior, and to comply strictly with all laws, rules and regulations applicable to their activities. Violation*

of conduct and/or noncompliance with applicable rules and policies will result in disciplinary action, up to and including termination."

"Each Chief Officer, Manager and Supervisor are responsible for monitoring and documenting the performance and conduct of assigned personnel and keeping them informed of their status. Additionally, the Supervisor is responsible for identifying, documenting, and attempting to correct problem situations. Action shall be taken as soon as the Chief Officer, Manager or Supervisor has knowledge of a performance or conduct problem. Inaction is considered equivalent to condoning the situation."

"The following are some examples of violations of the Clerk's policy: excessive absences or tardiness, use of abusive language, neglect of property, violation of safety rules, inappropriate use of resources, excessive socialization (including telephone calls), below-required-level work performance, insubordination, conduct detrimental to the office image, infraction of applicable rules, dishonesty, carelessness, using (or being under the influence of) unauthorized drugs or alcohol during work hours (including the lunch period), conduct which disrupts office harmony, conduct which disrupts business activity, improper treatment of the public, theft, lying, falsification of information, breach of confidentiality, or information resources security violations."

901 – Fraud, Waste and Abuse: "*Chiefs, Managers, and Supervisors are responsible for establishing and maintaining a system of internal controls to provide reasonable assurance of the efficiency of their operations, including the prevention and detection of fraud, waste, abuse, and misconduct.*"

Investigative Actions

The objective of the investigation was to determine if it could be substantiated that the Subjects abused their positions to favor one or more employees with preferential treatment over other employees.

The scope of the investigation focused on the allegations provided within the complaint. The time period for the investigative review was established from calendar year 2021 through 2024.

The methodology of the investigation was to:

- Interview the Subjects of the investigation
- Interview Witnesses (current and former Employees)
- Review of Clerk policies
- Perform data analytics
- Review department and personnel records

Findings and Recommendations

Employee A: This employee (Intermediate Clerk - date of hire: 7/26/2021) was identified as a favored employee and selected for further review. After her promotion to Supervisor, Ms. Esposito continued having a close personal association/relationship with this direct report. This association/relationship was well known and confirmed by other interviewees. The details of this association/relationship included regularly taking breaks and lunches together, attending social gatherings, frequent personal phone calls, visiting each other's homes, to include use of Ms. Esposito's residence pool. Our findings are detailed below:

- This employee dropped-off passport applications at the post office. Per inquiry and a review of the Passport Post Office Run schedule, this responsibility was reserved for Leads, and Management. At a minimum, this employee was scheduled to perform this task on December 28, 2023, January 8, 2024 and April 4, 2024. The email dated March 9, 2023, from Mr. Platten to Ms. Gabrick regarding a defensive driving course referenced Employee A for purposes of "*post office runs and Cape Coral office coverage*". Employee A, acknowledged leaving earlier than established in order to complete this task, and using a post office near a child care provider.

  During our interview, Mr. Platten was unable to support Management's decision for selecting this Intermediate Clerk as their substitute above others in the department.

- This employee was the first selected to work on collecting signatures for public meeting minutes for a period of several months until taking an extended leave. This assignment was documented in the internal department folder labeled: [Employee A]-Minutes, and email correspondence. This special assignment was not part of an Intermediate Clerk's main job function.

- This employee regularly assisted Management with department procedures and other tasks. According to email correspondence, at a minimum, this Employee was involved with:

  - Passport Slip Hand Out (email date: 7/7/2023)
  - Scheduling & Attending Virtual Marriage License Procedures (email date: 12/8/2023)
  - Virtual License Ceremony Counts Spreadsheet (email date: 1/22/2024)
  - Virtual Marriage License – Terms and Conditions (email date: 4/24/2024)
  - Work on Minutes Signature Procedures (7/11/2024 one hr. meeting w/Ms. Esposito)
  - Researched the future of Florida (7/11/2024)
  - Researched the Housing Market for Lee County (7/11/2024)
  - Minutes Signature Procedures (email dated: 7/17/2024, & 7/25/2024)
  - New Virtual Marriage License Spreadsheet (email date: 12/2/2024)

Note: Employee A was on extended leave August 2024 through October 2024.

This Employee's 2023 Performance Evaluation denotes: *"has suggested ways to improve the virtual process and implement some effective changes in the tracking process that has streamlined the process for everyone."* The 2024 Internal Leadership Yearly Goals Tracking Sheet (last saved on 11/20/2024) notes: *Create the procedure for routing meeting minutes for signatures and submit to leadership".* These opportunities were solely afforded to this employee, other experienced Intermediate Clerks reporting to Ms. Esposito had no such comment noted in their respective evaluations and yearly goals.

- Employee A assisted Management with department activities during work hours. This employee confirmed participation noting them as *"employee engagement activities"*. One interviewee stated *"[Employee A] spends most of her time fooling around and doing craft projects."* Another stated*,"[Employee A] spends most of her time doing arts and crafts during work hours."*

  The department file: Pictures – Holidays stores many pictures of activities particularly in 2023 and 2024 involving elaborate themes. The following emails were sent by Employee A to Ms. Esposito:

  - February 13, 2023, office baby shower email verbiage approval request.
  - April 22, 2024, game cards (Refer to Exhibit B):

    "Good Morning,

    Attached is 2 different options of the approved Guess Who game card.
    Please let me know if there's anything that needs to be changed or adjusted"

  - July 8, 2024, twenty-seven name tags for an Olympic themed Birthday celebration:

    "Please print out these name tags"

According to the 2023 Annual Evaluation this employee was afforded the opportunity to train on CCMB (County Commissioners Minutes Board) and CRS (County Records Services) procedures. These type of trainings are unrelated to the current job function. The Annual Evaluation states: *"[Employee A] has recently been trained on CCMB and other CRS tasks in order to help with the department workload."* Per the Internal Leadership Yearly Goals Tracking Sheet (last saved on November 15, 2024), Employee A was untrained on: Deposits, MyFlorida, and Redaction procedures which directly pertain to the current job function. Other Intermediate Clerks reporting to Ms. Esposito (exception Employee B) were not afforded advance training opportunities.

- The 2023 Annual Evaluation was completed by Ms. Esposito; Employee A, received a higher pay increase than other Intermediate Clerks with similar or greater productivity (data analysis derived from Q-Flow and Landmark systems), number of Kudo Cards received and work accuracy (per Recording Payment/Deed Issues worksheet). Ms. Gabrick confirmed that Employee A was not a top-performer.

Employee B: Per inquiry, this Employee (Intermediate Clerk - date of hire: September 27, 2021) was identified as favored and selected for further review. Employee B confirmed having a personal association/relationship with Ms. Gabrick. This included playing pickle-ball at a local park and pet-sitting arrangements. It is important to note that Ms. Gabrick was untruthful in her response to the following interview question: *"Do you have any personal relationships with any of your employees, please provide details?"* The aforementioned association/relationship and the extent of the association/relationship were not disclosed. Moreover, Ms. Esposito and this Employee (a direct report) confirmed having a personal association/relationship outside of work. They socialized during Everblades Hockey games, movies, dinners and by personal phone calls. These personal associations/relationships were well known and confirmed by other interviewees.

This Employee received preferential treatment that was not offered to others. Human Resources (HR), confirmed it had no records to indicate the agency had a known obligation to afford such treatment to this Employee. Employee B was not the most productive (per data analysis derived from Q-Flow and Landmark systems) and did not apply for the opened County Records Services position; however, for several months this Employee was allowed to cross train on this new job function. According to department training records, this Employee was untrained on Virtual Marriage Ceremonies, Deposits, MyFlorida and Redactions procedures. Below are further details:

- On March 28, 2023, Ms. Gabrick sent the following email to Recording Supervisors stating: *"Also, I am pulling [Employee B] from customer service" "[Employee B] will stay on mail until further notice."*

- On March 29, 2023, Ms. Gabrick sent an email notifying County Records staff that: *"Just a heads up that [Employee B] is going to work on verifying CCMBs"*

  On the same day, a subsequent email from Employee B thanked Ms. Gabrick for being *"accommodating"*.

  Per the Agent Daily Performance Analysis report, this Employee had 113 days with no customers served.

- On November 28, 2023, Ms. Gabrick notified Human Resources that Employee B was *"trying out"* the County Records Services Specialist position and requested that the current job posting be closed.

- On December 5, 2023, Ms. Gabrick sent an email notification to County Records Staff and Supervisors stating*: "[Employee B] will be working in CRS in the mornings and ORS in the afternoons."*

- On April 4, 2024, Ms. Gabrick sent notification to Sr. Management stating: *"I was going to keep [Employee B] as ½ MIN and ½ REC, currently she is 100% billed to REC account strings, but I was going to do an eRPA after the evals have gone in to split her account strings. I do not need her in Minutes fully at this time, having her in both is working out well."*

- On April 17, 2024, Ms. Gabrick notified Sr. Management *"I will be doing a promotion request for [Employee B] now that evals are done so she has an accurate job description, title, account strings and compensation."*

- On May 10, 2024, another Employee tasked with training Employee B expressed concern over the progress of Employee B.

  An interviewee felt blamed and targeted by Ms. Gabrick after voicing concerns regarding Employee B's poor performance and lack of ability to understand job requirements.

- A draft Promotion Request/Pay Increase Justification form last saved by Ms. Gabrick on May 23, 2024 suggested an effective date of June 8th 2024 and 5% pay increase.

- On or about June 7, 2024, Employee B decided not to proceed with the CRS position, preferring to stay in the Official Records Services position.

- On June 10, 2024, Ms. Gabrick informed HR that the cross training efforts were *"not a good fit"*. A request was made to repost the position.

Per inquiry, it was identified that Employee B's mistakes would go unaddressed. It is our understanding that Ms. Gabrick would intervene and resolve the situation. The following two questions were asked of Ms. Gabrick during her interview:

- *"Would you agree that [Employee B] received greater latitude with regards to mistakes being made and with no documentation?"* Ms. Gabrick stated: "*probably*". Upon further discussion with Ms. Gabrick, this was done to avoid bringing the errors to the attention of this Employee due to the current state of this individual.
- *"Have you ever purposely not written up or told others not to write up [Employee B] for mistakes?"* Ms. Gabrick stated: *"Yes"*

Management's disciplinary approach with Employee B and Employee C (noted below) was not afforded to all. For instance, another department employee was verbally, and then formally disciplined for six payment errors as noted in the personnel records kept by HR.

Employee C: Per inquiry, this Employee (Advanced Clerk - date of hire: 9/23/2002)**,** was identified and selected for further review. Human Resource (HR) confirmed it had no records to indicate the agency had a known obligation to afford lenient treatment to this Employee. Ms. Esposito confirmed having a personal association/relationship with this Employee. This Employee made at least eight recording errors in 2024 that were not formally addressed by Management.

On or about May 25, 2023, Employee C made an indexing error in which the fees and payment were shown as $13,020,289. This Employee met with Mr. Platten and received a Progressive Disciplinary Action documenting the discussion. On or about June 3, 2024, a mortgage transaction was charged doc stamps on an incorrectly entered consideration amount of $1,700,000. This Employee received an email warning from Ms. Gabrick.

In addition, multiple inappropriate behavior issues resulted in Mr. Platten discussing the issues with this Employee, according to a memorandum dated December 8, 2023, and a Progressive Discipline Action form dated December 14, 2023. These were saved to the internal disciplinary management folder. The 2023 Annual Evaluation omitted these occurrences.

The main issue below was well known and continued to occur in 2024 based on corroborated statements. Further, Employee C was found to be untruthful during our interview.

On April 23, 2023, Mr. Platten received the following email from another Employee *"Can you please give me some clarification on the direction that was given to [Employee C] regarding his*

assistance here in this office. I know you have said in the past that you monitor the statistics in our Q-Flow, and it seems that the days [Employee C] has been here, I am having to wait on approximately 20 or so more customers a day then he does. I have never had this problem with [co-worker1], [co-worker1], [co-worker1] and I didn't know if he was told something different as far as his assistance here."

Mr. Platten, responded on April 26, 2023: *"He is not told anything different on what his assistance is. I see that you are doing double the amount of tickets and documents when he is working there with you. I will address and talk to him on Friday when he is back in the office."*

An email dated September 27, 2023, the same Employee notified Mr. Platten and Ms. Gabrick of the following: *"Not sure what I am supposed to do about this situation, but I caught [Employee C] falling asleep at his desk today and my customer that I was waiting on noticed it too. In the last few weeks two other clerks in this office have seen him with his eyes closed at his desk and three others have walked by him on other occasions and told him to wake up."* Mr. Platten sent a subsequent email to Ms. Gabrick, *"I called [Employee C] and spoke to him on the phone about staying awake and getting up to walk around if he feels dozy/tired." "I didn't email [Co-worker] back wasn't sure if we wanted to ask her to let us know if it happens again."*

A Supervisor from a different department brought similar concerns to Mr. Platten's attention and copied Ms. Gabrick and Ms. Esposito per email dated November 21, 2023. *"I have also seen [Employee C] look drowsy where his eyes look as if he is falling asleep but I thought it was a medication situation? But I have never seeing him fall asleep. [Another employee] did mention that sometimes when he is alone and a customer is waiting to be called, he takes long to call them and she has to say out loud that someone will be right with them and then he calls them."*

"While discussing this with my Lead Clerk as she spent a month in the Cape, she told me that she did witness [Employee C] fall asleep at the counter every day. She would notice his head down and twice she walked by him and he told her he had a headache."

On December 8th, 2023, Ms. Gabrick and Mr. Platten were again notified of the following: "*On a daily basis, [Employee C] does not hide the fact from our customers that he is constantly looking at his phone, where my customers have said, "I want his job*" "*I feel it is disrespectful to our customers when he yells across the room "what are you doing here" as they enter our office, and the way he addresses his male customers as far as calling them bro, my man, buddy, brother and so on."* In a subsequent email sent to the Department Chief, by Ms. Gabrick it stated: *"Bryan addressed the phone issue with [Employee C] and [Employee C] said he is not ON his phone, but he does listen to his music with his earbud when he works in the queues and if he wants to skip a song, he does so on his phone. Bryan explained that it could appear to someone that he was on his phone if he kept pulling it out and [Employee C] said he would be more conscientious of it. Bryan did document the conversation."*

Conclusion

The IG Department reaches one of the following three conclusions of fact for each allegation at the conclusion of an investigation:

- Substantiated: The allegations are validated and there are sufficient case-supporting materials to justify a reasonable conclusion that the actions occurred, and there were violations of law, policy, rule, or contract.
- Not Substantiated: There are sufficient case-supporting materials to justify a reasonable conclusion that the alleged actions did not occur, or there were no identified violations of law, policy, rule, or contract.
- Unfounded: The allegations are not validated and there are insufficient case-supporting materials to prove or disprove the allegations.

Allegation 1: *"This department is based off of favoritism and who you orchestrate with outside of work, which is very unfair to the individuals that choose to work and not interact outside the workplace."* **Substantiated.** The investigation results were based upon:

- Interviews with Witnesses and Subjects
- Examination of records as detailed for Employee A, B and C as noted above.
- Policy violated: 306, 412, 413, 801, and 901

Allegation 2: *"Evaluations have been fabricated in many different ways"* **Substantiated.** The investigation results were based upon:

- Interviews with Witnesses and Subjects
- Examination of emails, 2023 Annual Evaluations, data analysis derived from Q-Flow and Landmark systems as noted above.
- Policy Violated 412

Allegation 3: *"You have clerks that weren't fully trained in the basics at the time taking on bigger tasks that they had no business advancing to."* **Substantiated.** The investigation results were based upon:

- Interviews with Witnesses and Subjects
- Examination of emails, the 2023 Annual Evaluations, Yearly Goals Tracking Sheet, and Training Items Tracking Sheet as noted above.
- Policy Violated**:** 306, 413 and 901

Allegation 4: *"I have witnessed and watched clerks* neglect *customers and job duties to take on special projects like cutting out and coloring papers during business hours."* **Substantiated.** The investigation results were based upon:

- Interviews with Witnesses and Subjects as it relates to Employee A as noted above.
- Policy Violated 306, and 901

Allegation 5: *"I have watched clerks make numerous accounting mistakes, drawer mistakes, simple mistakes and advanced mistakes. I have watched and noticed that only certain (minorities) clerks are reprimanded for those same exact mistakes."* **Substantiated.** The investigation results were based upon:

- Interviews with Witnesses and Subjects
- Examination of the Recording Payment/Deed Issues worksheet, Department's Employee Discipline Folders, HR Records as noted above.
- Policy Violated: 801

Allegation 6: "*I have noticed that upper management like Eileen , Bryan and especially Lisa Esposito give these individuals these additional small tasks to cover there tracks. But this doesn't make up for the task that they were hired to do and are failing to do.*" **Substantiated.** The investigation results were based upon:

- Interviews with Witnesses and Subjects
- Examination of the emails, the 2023 Annual Evaluations, folder labeled [Employee]-Minutes, and the Passport Post Office Run schedule as noted above.
- Policy Violated: 306 and 901

Inspector General Department
Investigative Report
Alleged Favoritism

Exhibit A: Anonymous Tip

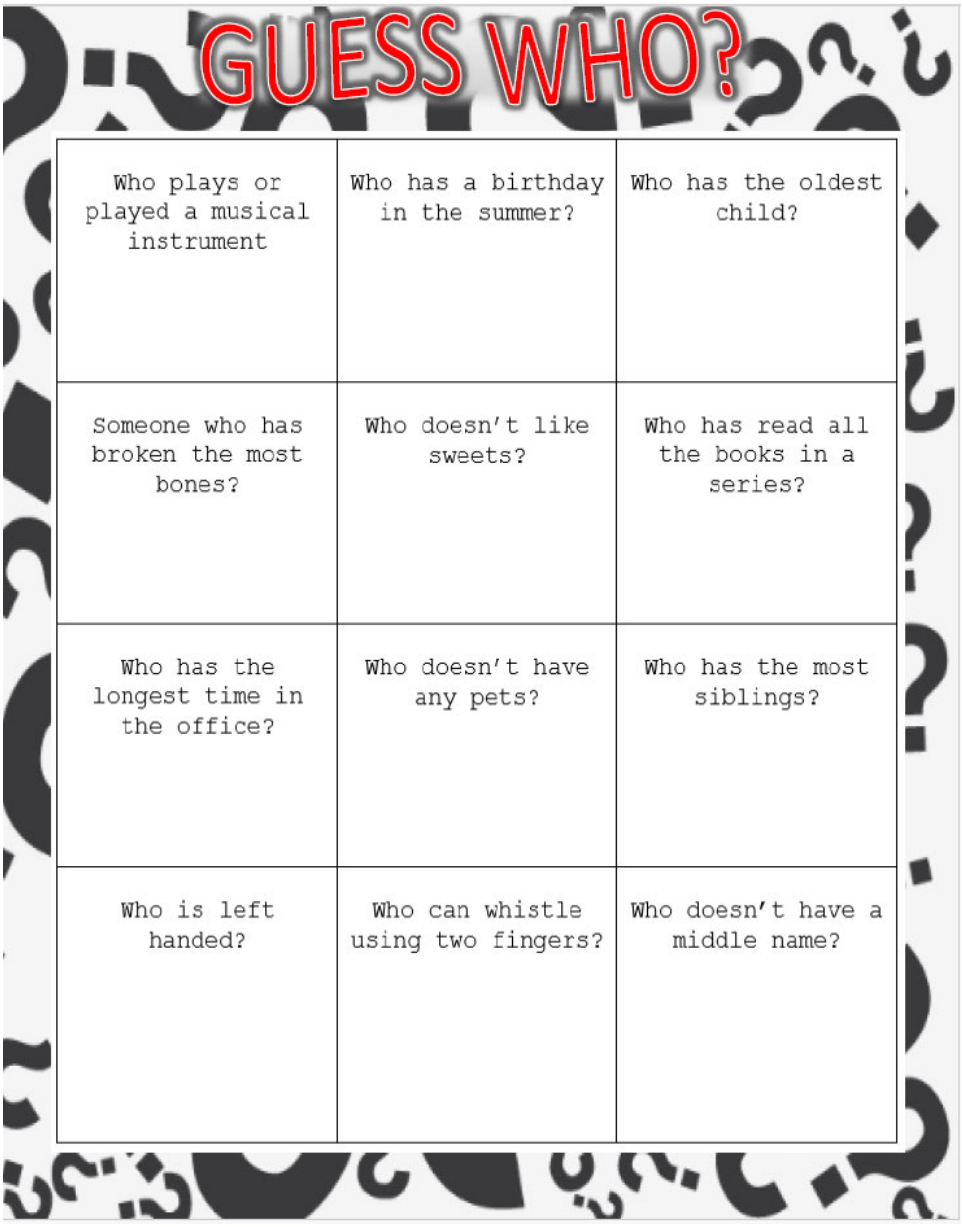
From: Unknown Unknown <unknownclerksleeclerk@gmail.com>
Sent: Thursday, July 11, 2024 9:25 AM
To: Janice Bunting

This Message Is From an Untrusted Sender

PHISHING SCAMS ARE ON THE RISE! Please use proper judgment when opening attachments and clicking links. You are our BEST defense!!

To whom it may concern,
I am sending this email in high hopes that it'll reach the right person and possibly open the eyes of the folks that can make a change. I am doing this anonymously because, as I've watched in the past, when something is reported to a manager or HR, the retaliation begins. I'd like to shift the attention to a few things that are currently happening in the recording department and being swept right under the mat in our faces. I'd first like to start with the positive. The job is an immaculate job in itself. The duties within keep you very busy and on your toes. Secondly, I'd love to turn attention to how unfair a lot of the employees are treated in the recording office. This department is based off of favoritism and who you orchestrate with outside of work, which is very unfair to the individuals that choose to work and not interact outside the workplace. I am calling for an investigation to be done in terms of salaries and the work produced. Evaluations have been fabricated in many different ways. I have worked rigorously through the years to produce my best work for it to go unnoticed and overlooked because I am not a" favorite ". I have fixed many errors of those others that are given more responsibility that truly don't deserve it. I, as well as others, have been overlooked when it comes to certain trainings as we aren't good enough. You have clerks that weren't fully trained in the basics at the time taking on bigger tasks that they had no business advancing to. I have witnessed and watched clerks neglect customers and job duties to take on special projects like cutting out and coloring papers during business hours. Did I mention this has actually only taken place because of favoritism? I have watched people advance when they aren't even really capable of doing/handling the job. It saddens me daily that people who are really excellent at this job are put on the back burner. The physical and mental fight about whether to stay on the job you love, but knowing the salaries and advancement aren't truthful sucks for any human being to have to battle. I am asking that the investigation is done in a manner in which every clerk's work production/worth ethic reflects and matches the salaries as well as the evaluations given. I have watched clerks make numerous accounting mistakes, drawer mistakes, simple mistakes and advanced mistakes. I have watched and noticed that only certain (minorities) clerks are reprimanded for those same exact mistakes.
I have noticed that upper management like Eileen , Bryan and especially Lisa Esposito give these individuals these additional small tasks to cover there tracks. But this doesn't make up for the task that they were hired to do and are failing to do.

Exhibit B: Game Card



Recommendations

The Inspector General (IG) Department investigated allegations of favoritism within the Official and County Records Department. A Department Manager and Supervisor had personal association/relationship with at least three subordinates. Management's favored treatment of these three employees, allowed a toxic work environment to cultivate.

Two former employees expressed that favoritism was part of the reason for leaving the agency; one current employee considered separating from the agency based on this issue.

During the course of this investigation, we made several observations and identified opportunities for improvement. We offer the following recommendations to add-value, strengthen internal controls, and improve the working environment and department culture.

We recommend:

- Senior Leadership restructures or reassigns individuals as needed to mitigate the compromised reporting structure.
- Required workplace Ethics training for the department management and employees.
- Implementing a department wide employee training and development program.
    - This program to provide a structured and planned approach to promote equal learning and progression opportunities to all department employees.
- Improving the process of documenting and addressing performance issues and violations of policy.
    - This is necessary to reduce the risk of selective enforcement. The offenses/deficiencies and the minimum disciplinary actions to be taken must be detailed.
- Developing transparent policies to ensure salary increases, special assignments and promotional opportunities are awarded on a substantive basis.
- Establishing transparent employee participation guidelines for non-work events that promote an inclusive and fair work environment.
    - Examples: Decorating for holidays, special events, and other non-work events.
- Revising the Employee Policy Manual to include:
    - A personal cell phone and other wireless device policy restricting workstation usage of such devices for public facing employees. These devices must be restricted to emergencies and during scheduled breaks or lunch periods in non-working areas to prevent a negative customer perception and/or interaction.

- Requiring a Conflict-of-Interest disclosure form to be signed and reviewed annually by all levels of leadership, which addresses disclosure of romantic, familial, business or close personal association/relationship that might reasonably give rise to an actual or perceived conflict of interest.
- Requiring a Fraternization Policy, such as:

"Supervisors must conduct themselves at all times in such a way as to allow them to be objective in carrying out their responsibilities such as assigning work, appraising performance, and administering discipline.

Supervisors who engage in romantic or personal relationships with subordinates are subject to compromising their ability to be objective and to treat all employees equally. Additionally, romantic or personal relationships can potentially expose the [Clerk] to harassment allegations.

Therefore, it is the policy of the [Clerk] to disallow and expressly prohibit supervisors to engage in a romantic or personal relationship with any employee who is a subordinate of the supervisor. A subordinate of the supervisor is defined for the purpose herein as any employee whom the supervisor has the ability or responsibility to hire, promote, appraise performance and similar activities, or any employee for whom the supervisor has the ability or responsibility to recommend such actions". [1]

[1]Retrieved from: City of Fernandina Beach 2023 Personnel Policy Manual

March 3, 2025

After careful review, I am writing in response to the Inspector General's Investigative Report into Alleged Favoritism. Please find my detailed responses enclosed within this document.

Employee A

1. **Report states:** This employee dropped-off passport applications at the post office. Per inquiry and a review of the Passport Post Office Run schedule, this responsibility was reserved for Leads, and Management. At a minimum, this employee was scheduled to perform this task on December 28, 2023, January 8, 2024 and April 4, 2024. The email dated March 9, 2023, from Mr. Platten to Ms. Gabrick regarding a defensive driving course referenced Employee A for purposes of "*post office runs and Cape Coral office coverage*". Employee A, acknowledged leaving earlier than established in order to complete this task, and using a post office near a child care provider.
   During our interview, Mr. Platten was unable to support Management's decision for selecting this Intermediate Clerk as their substitute above others in the department.

EGabrick Response:

According to the Official Records Services (ORS) office calendar and Kronos, on December 28, 2023, Manager Eileen Gabrick was out of the office all day and Supervisor Bryan Platten left the office at 1:04pm. It was a leadership decision to ask a clerk, Employee A, to take the passports to the post office so that there was a Supervisor and two Lead clerks available for customers, cash drawer verification and clerk issues.
According to the Official Records Services (ORS) office calendar and Kronos, on January 8, 2024, Bryan Platten, Lisa Esposito, and Margaret Cossairt were out of the office all day. It was a leadership decision to ask a clerk to take the passports to the post office so that there was a Manager and one Lead clerk available for customers, cash drawer verification and clerk issues.
According to the Official Records Services (ORS) office calendar and Kronos, on April 4, 2024, Employee A was out of the office all day and did not take the passports to the post office.

2. **Report states:** This employee was the first selected to work on collecting signatures for public meeting minutes for a period of several months until taking an extended leave. This assignment was documented in the internal department folder labeled: [Employee A]-Minutes, and email correspondence. This special assignment was not part of an Intermediate Clerk's main job function.

EGabrick Response:

Due to my time constraints managing two office and the fact that this employee had assisted me with CRS work in 2023 by verifying their County Commissioner Minutes Books digitization. I, as her Manager, requested Employee A to assist with the gathering, tracking, and routing of County Records Services (CRS) minutes for signatures to the BoCC chairman. Previously, this process was solely my responsibility. However, with my numerous other office obligations, it was not being completed as promptly as I desired. To enhance office efficiency, I enlisted Employee A's assistance in collecting the minutes that were ready for signature and in completing the Agenda Item Request document. On average, this task takes approximately 10-15 minutes every two weeks. This delegation helped streamline the process and ensured that tasks were completed in a timely manner. As a manager of two offices, I do leverage my resources to assist with workload from time to time.

3. **Report states:** This employee regularly assisted Management with department procedures and

other tasks. According to email correspondence, at a minimum, this Employee was involved with:

- Passport Slip Hand Out (email date: 7/7/2023)
- Scheduling & Attending Virtual Marriage License Procedures (email date: 12/8/2023)
- Virtual License Ceremony Counts Spreadsheet (email date: 1/22/2024)
- Virtual Marriage License – Terms and Conditions (email date: 4/24/2024)
- Work on Minutes Signature Procedures (7/11/2024 one hr. meeting w/Ms. Esposito)
- Researched the future of Florida (7/11/2024)
- Researched the Housing Market for Lee County (7/11/2024)
- Minutes Signature Procedures (email dated: 7/17/2024, & 7/25/2024)
- New Virtual Marriage License Spreadsheet (email date: 12/2/2024)

EGabrick Response:

Employee A handles multiple roles, including Passport Agent, Recording Clerk, and Virtual Services provider. She possesses the expertise and qualifications needed to assist with writing procedures or updating documents relevant to her areas of knowledge. Creating a procedure that effectively conveys the topic and ensures reader comprehension requires a specific skill set that not everyone possesses. Employee A's proficiency in her various roles and her ability to communicate information clearly make her a good candidate for these tasks.

4. **Report states:** This Employee's 2023 Performance Evaluation denotes: *"has suggested ways to improve the virtual process and implement some effective changes in the tracking process that has streamlined the process for everyone."* The 2024 Internal Leadership Yearly Goals Tracking Sheet (last saved on 11/20/2024) notes: *Create the procedure for routing meeting minutes for signatures and submit to leadership".* These opportunities were solely afforded to this employee, other experienced Intermediate Clerks reporting to Ms. Esposito had no such comment noted in their respective evaluations and yearly goals.

EGabrick Response:

In Employee A's 2023 evaluation, it was noted in the "Rater Comments for Competencies" section that she had "suggested ways to improve the virtual process and implemented effective changes in the tracking process, streamlining it for everyone" which she did. However, in the goals section, she was assigned the goal of "Creating the procedure for routing meeting minutes for signatures and submitting it to leadership by August 1, 2024." This goal was set because she was actively performing the task and had demonstrated strong skills in writing procedures. Other employees were not given this opportunity, as they were not involved in this specific task and, therefore, would not have been able to document the process accurately. This targeted goal was intended to leverage her expertise and ensure the procedure was well documented and effective.

5. **Report states:** Employee A assisted Management with department activities during work hours. This employee confirmed participation noting them as *"employee engagement activities"*. One interviewee stated *"[Employee A] spends most of her time fooling around and doing craft projects."* Another stated*,"[Employee A] spends most of her time doing arts and crafts during work hours."*

   The department file: Pictures – Holidays stores many pictures of activities particularly in 2023 and 2024 involving elaborate themes. The following emails were sent by Employee A to Ms. Esposito:

EGabrick Response:
Yes, Employee A did assist leadership with team building activities. Our office frequently engages in team building activities to reinforce camaraderie, trust, fun, communication, morale, and inclusion. For example, the February 13, 2023 email was about planning a baby shower for a fellow coworker, which we celebrated as a team. Exhibit B was an "ice breaker" game I brought back from the Property Records Industry Association conference, used in the office as a "getting to know you" activity. Additionally, the July 8, 2024 email pertained to birthday celebration décor for my birthday, which the office organized and celebrated as a team.
I have personally invested a significant amount of time and money into team building activities for our office because I believe they are crucial for keeping employees engaged, ensuring they feel appreciated, celebrating milestones as a team, and ultimately improving employee retention. These activities foster a positive work environment and contribute to our overall success.

6. **Report states:** According to the 2023 Annual Evaluation this employee was afforded the opportunity to train on CCMB (County Commissioners Minutes Board) and CRS (County Records Services) procedures. These type of trainings are unrelated to the current job function. The Annual Evaluation states: *"[Employee A] has recently been trained on CCMB and other CRS tasks in order to help with the department workload."* Per the Internal Leadership Yearly Goals Tracking Sheet (last saved on November 15, 2024), Employee A was untrained on: Deposits, MyFlorida, and Redaction procedures which directly pertain to the current job function. Other Intermediate Clerks reporting to Ms. Esposito (exception Employee B) were not afforded advance training opportunities.
   - The 2023 Annual Evaluation was completed by Ms. Esposito; Employee A, received a higher pay increase than other Intermediate Clerks with similar or greater productivity (data analysis derived from Q-Flow and Landmark systems), number of Kudo Cards received and work accuracy (per Recording Payment/Deed Issues worksheet). Ms. Gabrick confirmed that Employee A was not a top-performer.

EGabrick Response:
While Ms. Esposito did complete Employee A's performance evaluation, it went through all appropriate approval paths, including reviews by another supervisor, her Manager, and finally her Chief Officer. The compensation is determined by the competency ratings, which are entered into a Merit Calculator spreadsheet provided by my Chief Officer on 02/12/2024 to determine the merit.

Although I confirmed that Employee A is not classified as a "top performer," I want to highlight her qualities as a dedicated and loyal employee. She consistently achieves strong statistics across all aspects of her work, maintains a positive attitude, provides exceptional customer service, and willingly volunteers for overtime/Passport Saturday/Clerk events. Additionally, she demonstrates remarkable versatility and bilingual skills. For the period of January 1-December 31, 2024, with extended leave between August 2024 and October 2024, Employee A processed 327 marriage license applications, performed 107 wedding ceremonies, processed 486 passport applications, processed 2,587 non-eRecorded documents, 5,167 eRecorded documents, verified 1,235 documents and suspended 642 documents. She performed 65 virtual marriage license issuance/wedding ceremony appointments. She took 1379 front line customers with an average service time of 12:20 and provided coverage to the call center by taking 131 phone calls with an average talk time of 2:53.

Employee B

7. **Report States:** Per inquiry, this Employee (Intermediate Clerk - date of hire: September 27, 2021) was identified as favored and selected for further review. Employee B confirmed having a personal association/relationship with Ms. Gabrick. This included playing pickle-ball at a local park and pet-sitting arrangements. It is important to note that Ms. Gabrick was untruthful in her response to the following interview question: *"Do you have any personal relationships with any of your employees, please provide details?"* The aforementioned association/relationship and the extent of the association/relationship were not disclosed. Moreover, Ms. Esposito and this Employee (a direct report) confirmed having a personal association/relationship outside of work. They socialized during Everblades Hockey games, movies, dinners and by personal phone calls. These personal associations/relationships were well known and confirmed by other interviewees.

EGabrick Response:

I want to clarify that I was not untruthful in my response to the question, "Do I ***have*** any personal relationships with any of my employees." Firstly, there was no definition of "personal relationship" provided during my interview nor was a timeframe given. Secondly, I am disappointed that if Omar or Sarah had any doubts about the honesty of my response, they did not follow up with additional questions to clarify. Since I was not given the opportunity to clarify during the interview, I will do so now. While I maintain a friendly rapport with my employees, I do not consider these interactions to be "personal relationships." As an effective leader, I believe that knowing personal details about my employees is essential for fostering a positive and supportive work environment. While I did play pickle ball with Employee B on several Monday nights in 2023, we did not travel to the gym together or socialize after playing. I considered these interactions akin to working out at the same gym as someone. There were occasions when we played on the same team or court, but the court assignments were determined by a paddle system used at that gym. However, I have not played pickle ball in over a year and I do not typically hang out with my employees outside of work hours.

8. **Report States:** This Employee received preferential treatment that was not offered to others. Human Resources (HR), confirmed it had no records to indicate the agency had a known obligation to afford such treatment to this Employee. Employee B was not the most productive (per data analysis derived from Q-Flow and Landmark systems) and did not apply for the opened County Records Services position; however, for several months this Employee was allowed to cross train on this new job function. According to department training records, this Employee was untrained on Virtual Marriage Ceremonies, Deposits, MyFlorida and Redactions procedures. Below are further details:

- On March 28, 2023, Ms. Gabrick sent the following email to Recording Supervisors stating: *"Also, I am pulling [Employee B] from customer service" "[Employee B] will stay on mail until further notice."*
- On March 29, 2023, Ms. Gabrick sent an email notifying County Records staff that: *"Just a heads up that [Employee B] is going to work on verifying CCMBs"*
  On the same day, a subsequent email from Employee B thanked Ms. Gabrick for being *"accommodating"*.
  Per the Agent Daily Performance Analysis report, this Employee had 113 days with no customers served.

- On November 28, 2023, Ms. Gabrick notified Human Resources that Employee B was

"trying out" the County Records Services Specialist position and requested that the current job posting be closed.

- On December 5, 2023, Ms. Gabrick sent an email notification to County Records Staff and Supervisors stating*: "[Employee B] will be working in CRS in the mornings and ORS in the afternoons."*
- On April 4, 2024, Ms. Gabrick sent notification to Sr. Management stating: *"I was going to keep [Employee B] as ½ MIN and ½ REC, currently she is 100% billed to REC account strings, but I was going to do an eRPA after the evals have gone in to split her account strings. I do not need her in Minutes fully at this time, having her in both is working out well."*
- On April 17, 2024, Ms. Gabrick notified Sr. Management *"I will be doing a promotion request for [Employee B] now that evals are done so she has an accurate job description, title, account strings and compensation."*
- On May 10, 2024, another Employee tasked with training Employee B expressed concern over the progress of Employee B.
  An interviewee felt blamed and targeted by Ms. Gabrick after voicing concerns regarding Employee B's poor performance and lack of ability to understand job requirements.
- A draft Promotion Request/Pay Increase Justification form last saved by Ms. Gabrick on May 23, 2024 suggested an effective date of June 8th 2024 and 5% pay increase.
- On or about June 7, 2024, Employee B decided not to proceed with the CRS position, preferring to stay in the Official Records Services position.
- On June 10, 2024, Ms. Gabrick informed HR that the cross training efforts were *"not a good fit"*. A request was made to repost the position.

EGabrick Response:

There are two different scenarios intermingled in this report item.

Scenario 1: The March 28 email highlighted instances where Employee B became uncontrollably emotional in front of customers and coworkers, affecting her confidence when dealing with customers. To ensure we were providing the best possible customer service, I made the leadership decision to remove her from the customer service counter. It is important that our customer service clerks maintain composure to represent our agency well. Consequently, I decided to remove her from the front line until she could regain her composure and consistently provide quality customer service.

The March 29 email was notifying CRS employees that had digitized County Commissioner Minutes Books (CCMBs) that she would be verifying their work, and assisting with their workload. This employee had assisted CRS with verifying CCMBs prior to this email on this date. As a manager of two offices, I do leverage my resources to assist with workload from time to time. The investigative report does not contain the complete email string in which Employee B's email on this same day acknowledged the issue mentioned above, stated she was seeing a doctor, and stated she appreciated me "trying to accommodate these issues." There were follow up emails on the same day where I advised employee to see HR about FMLA and then the employee responding back that she had in fact been in contact with both Christy and Tina in HR and advised that she would get that paperwork to her doctor as soon as possible.

Scenario 2: In November 2023, we advertised the position for CRS Specialist, conducted interviews, and ultimately offered the position to a candidate who declined the offer. Subsequently, Employee B expressed interest in the position. I suggested that she work part-time in both CRS and ORS to

determine if the position would be a good fit for her. While Employee B has strong writing skills, I noted that their might be personality challenges within the small CRS team, which might affect her suitability. Our goal was to provide CRS with additional support while continuing to utilize Employee B's skills in ORS. However, the training did not go as planned. Working in CRS only in the mornings did not give her enough time to fully understand the processes from start to finish, resulting in her missing parts of the process. Tasks such as preparing for a BoCC meeting, attending the meeting, and writing minutes require full-day engagement. Before implementing this plan, I informed Human Resources through the email mentioned in the report, as well as my Chief Officer. Following multiple meetings with CRS employees and Employee B, it was determined that the position was not a suitable fit. Consequently, we decided to move Employee B back to ORS full time to maintain office harmony and productivity for all.

9. **Report States:** Per inquiry, it was identified that Employee B's mistakes would go unaddressed. It is our understanding that Ms. Gabrick would intervene and resolve the situation. The following two questions were asked of Ms. Gabrick during her interview:
   - *"Would you agree that [Employee B] received greater latitude with regards to mistakes being made and with no documentation?"* Ms. Gabrick stated: "*probably*". Upon further discussion with Ms. Gabrick, this was done to avoid bringing the errors to the attention of this Employee due to the current state of this individual.
   - *"Have you ever purposely not written up or told others not to write up [Employee B] for mistakes?"* Ms. Gabrick stated: *"Yes"*

EGabrick Response:

I do not recall these questions specifically about Employee B. Employee B's work in ORS is deliberate, and if she makes errors, they are promptly addressed. She had two deed errors in 2022, a payment error in 2022, a payment error in 2023 and one in 2024, all of which were addressed with the employee. While her work in CRS may have contained errors, it is important to acknowledge that errors are a natural part of any training process. Although we document errors and inform the employee of each occurrence, we do not typically issue formal write-ups for a single error unless it is particularly egregious. We monitor for repeated errors, and if they recur, they are documented and discussed with the employee. I do not intervene when mistakes are made, as I believe they are a natural part of the learning process and essential for employee development. Allowing employees to learn from their errors helps them improve and grow in their roles. However, I do address conflicts when they arise between coworkers if they are unable to resolve the issues on their own.

10. **Report States:** Management's disciplinary approach with Employee B and Employee C (noted below) was not afforded to all. For instance, another department employee was verbally, and then formally disciplined for six payment errors as noted in the personnel records kept by HR.

EGabrick Response:

The issues mentioned in this report for Employee B and C were addressed directly with the respective employees. As stated in #9 above, although we document errors and inform the employee of each occurrence, we do not typically issue formal write-ups for a single error unless it is particularly egregious. We monitor for repeated errors, and if they recur, they are documented and discussed with the employee. Employee B had two deed errors and a payment error in 2022, followed by one error per year thereafter. The employee documented and spoke to for payment errors had multiple errors within a short period, specifically on 1/20/2022, 1/24/2022, 2/25/2022, 4/15/2022, 4/28/2022, 5/31/2022, and 7/1/2022.

Employee C

11. **Report States:** Per inquiry, this Employee (Advanced Clerk - date of hire: 9/23/2002)**,** was identified and selected for further review. Human Resource (HR) confirmed it had no records to indicate the agency had a known obligation to afford lenient treatment to this Employee. Ms. Esposito confirmed having a personal association/relationship with this Employee. This Employee made at least eight recording errors in 2024 that were not formally addressed by Management.

On or about May 25, 2023, Employee C made an indexing error in which the fees and payment were shown as $13,020,289. This Employee met with Mr. Platten and received a Progressive Disciplinary Action documenting the discussion. On or about June 3, 2024, a mortgage transaction was charged doc stamps on an incorrectly entered consideration amount of $1,700,000. This Employee received an email warning from Ms. Gabrick.

EGabrick Response:

The May 25 payment error was documented on a progressive discipline form. I acknowledge that the June 3, 2024 email that I sent to address the issue in the moment, should have been followed up with documentation on a progressive discipline form. While I acknowledge that Employee C had errors in 2024, however, it is important to note that these were not repeated errors. Over the course of the year, he processed 411 marriage applications, 790 passport applications, 3,752 non-eRecord documents, and 5,890 eRecorded documents, totaling 10,843 documents. With his nine errors (eight listed above and the one payment error in 2024), his error rate was approximately 0.083%. I do acknowledge that our office needs to develop a better method of tracking errors.

12. **Report States:** In addition, multiple inappropriate behavior issues resulted in Mr. Platten discussing the issues with this Employee, according to a memorandum dated December 8, 2023, and a Progressive Discipline Action form dated December 14, 2023. These were saved to the internal disciplinary management folder. The 2023 Annual Evaluation omitted these occurrences.

    The main issue below was well known and continued to occur in 2024 based on corroborated statements. Further, Employee C was found to be untruthful during our interview.

    On April 23, 2023, Mr. Platten received the following email from another Employee *"Can you please give me some clarification on the direction that was given to [Employee C] regarding his assistance here in this office. I know you have said in the past that you monitor the statistics in our Q-Flow, and it seems that the days [Employee C] has been here, I am having to wait on approximately 20 or so more customers a day then he does. I have never had this problem with [co-worker1], [co-worker1], [co-worker1] and I didn't know if he was told something different as far as his assistance here."*

    Mr. Platten, responded on April 26, 2023: *"He is not told anything different on what his assistance is. I see that you are doing double the amount of tickets and documents when he is working there with you. I will address and talk to him on Friday when he is back in the office."*

    An email dated September 27, 2023, the same Employee notified Mr. Platten and Ms. Gabrick of the following: *"Not sure what I am supposed to do about this situation, but I caught [Employee C] falling asleep at his desk today and my customer that I was waiting on noticed it too. In the last few weeks two other clerks in this office have seen him with his eyes closed at his desk and three others have walked by him on other occasions and told him to wake up."* Mr. Platten sent a subsequent email to Ms. Gabrick, *"I called [Employee C] and spoke to him on the phone about*

staying awake and getting up to walk around if he feels dozy/tired." "I didn't email [Co- worker] back wasn't sure if we wanted to ask her to let us know if it happens again."

A Supervisor from a different department brought similar concerns to Mr. Platten's attention and copied Ms. Gabrick and Ms. Esposito per email dated November 21, 2023. *"I have also seen [Employee C] look drowsy where his eyes look as if he is falling asleep but I thought it was a medication situation? But I have never seeing him fall asleep. [Another employee] did mention that sometimes when he is alone and a customer is waiting to be called, he takes long to call them and she has to say out loud that someone will be right with them and then he calls them." "While discussing this with my Lead Clerk as she spent a month in the Cape, she told me that she did witness [Employee C] fall asleep at the counter every day. She would notice his head down and twice she walked by him and he told her he had a headache."*

On December 8th, 2023, Ms. Gabrick and Mr. Platten were again notified of the following: "*On a daily basis, [Employee C] does not hide the fact from our customers that he is constantly looking at his phone, where my customers have said, "I want his job*" "*I feel it is disrespectful to our customers when he yells across the room "what are you doing here" as they enter our office, and the way he addresses his male customers as far as calling them bro, my man, buddy, brother and so on."* In a subsequent email sent to the Department Chief, by Ms. Gabrick it stated: *"Bryan addressed the phone issue with [Employee C] and [Employee C] said he is not ON his phone, but he does listen to his music with his earbud when he works in the queues and if he wants to skip a song, he does so on his phone. Bryan explained that it could appear to someone that he was on his phone if he kept pulling it out and [Employee C] said he would be more conscientious of it. Bryan did document the conversation."*

EGabrick Response:

The issue on April 23rd/26th was verbally addressed with the employee.
The issue on September 27th issue was addressed with the employee. The employee notified Bryan that it was a medical issue and that he is working with a physician. Regarding the email from November 21 in regards to the same issue, the investigative report does not contain the complete email string which shows that that other Supervisor acknowledged that the issue she was reporting was from September, which was addressed by us with the employee, this was not a reoccurrence. The email on December 8 resulted in the employee being formally documented for this issue on 12/14/2023 on a progressive discipline action form. Our leadership team has not witnessed nor been informed that this issue occurred after this was addressed with the employee.

Not mentioned directly in the investigative report, but important to highlight that the Official Records Services office has been working with the Records Management analyst for months to develop Employee Development Plans. These plans aim to provide transparency, assist employees in improving their skills, and outline their growth path within the organization.

Date: March 6, 2025

To: Inspector General Department

Re: Investigation of the Official & County Records Services Department

I would like to express my sincere appreciation to the investigatory team for conducting a thorough and detailed examination of the allegations of favoritism. The independent and objective perspective is invaluable, and I am grateful for the thoughtful recommendations provided in the final report.

The allegations and behavior outlined in the report are serious and now that the concerns have been substantiated, I am fully committed to addressing this matter quickly and comprehensively. The Chief of Human Resources, the newly designated Chief of Courts and Official Records, and I plan to meet on March 13th to discuss the recommendations outlined in the report. In the upcoming weeks, I will provide your office with a supplemental response, which will contain more detail on our intended action items. I can assure you, and our community, that changes will be implemented to guarantee these types of circumstances do not happen again in the future.

The leaders of this department are dedicated professionals and likely did not intend for their actions to negatively impact the office culture or to violate office policies. I am confident the new executive leader I have appointed to oversee this department will take the necessary steps to ensure a fair, harmonious, and productive work environment for all employees.

Once again, thank you for the important work you do on behalf of the Lee County Clerk's and Comptroller's Office and the citizens of Lee County.

Sincerely,

Kevin C. Karnes

Kevin C. Karnes

Lee County Clerk of Court and Comptroller