



Washington State Auditor's Office

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Independence • Respect • Integrity

Common Cents Commendations

"Sunlight is the best disinfectant"

I created the Common Cents Commendations when I served in the Legislature, to bring to light cases that showed a clear lack of common sense in the use of public resources. This is the fourth year of these awards, but my first year in the role of state auditor. The initial and continuing intent of the CCC's is to demonstrate Justice Brandeis' observation that "Sunlight is the best disinfectant."

Below are the 2013 CCC's:

Runners Up:

1. **Lax oversight of Washington's background check process.** The State Auditor's Office compared background check data with criminal history records of more than 800,000 applicants for positions of trust, such as foster parents, child care workers and nursing home aides. We found that about 500 people would have triggered a "rap back" notification, resulting in an investigation of information on recent criminal charges. On average, these individuals could have remained in their positions of trust for about 20 months before the next follow-up check alerted authorities of the criminal activity. About half of these applicants were charged with disqualifying offenses such as drug crimes, assault, indecent exposure, child molestation, burglary and theft. Our most vulnerable deserve better.
2. **The State Auditor's Office found inflated travel expenses by an individual director of a University of Washington college readiness program intended to help low-income students.** The audit was the result of a Whistleblower complaint about the employee, who headed a university program that works with high schools to better prepare low-income students for college. Statutorily, the University has a year to take corrective action. Among other things, we found: The employee frequently arrived at a destination the day before an event and stayed until the day after, racking up unnecessary hotel stays. The employee would find out from hotels how many rooms needed to be booked for her to get her own room upgraded to a suite, and then brought along unneeded staff, including interns, to earn an upgrade. Subordinates were required to attend extravagant dinners during conferences that they said were not a good use of grant funds. At one dinner, the employee falsified an attendance list to include 10 people who were not there. The employee frequently overspent on ground transportation. In one instance, she picked up a rental car in Las Vegas, at state expense, for a trip that was not supposed to begin until the next day and was unable to adequately justify the miles driven in the rental car.

And the Winner:

1. **Bullerville Water District.** After one family created their own taxing district, this entity managed to secure but never repay hundreds of thousands of dollars in loans from both Skagit County and the Department of Commerce. The loans were to be spent for improvements that were never completed. While the Skagit County Prosecutor's Office did not file charges, the audit brought the water commissioners' misuse of public funds and resources into the daylight of public scrutiny. The lost public funds have not been recovered.