



NEWS

From the Office of the New York State Inspector General
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Inspector General Uncovers \$1.2 Million in Improper OMRDD Contracts at Western New York DDSO *Nine Plead Guilty*

An investigation by New York State Inspector General Joseph Fisch uncovered \$1.2 million in contract irregularities, leading to criminal convictions against three contractors and six state employees.

Michael Roman, 57, of West Seneca, a maintenance supervisor for the state Office of Mental Retardation and Developmental Disabilities, pleaded guilty in Erie County Court today to filing a false instrument, a misdemeanor. Roman was one of six supervisors at the Western New York Developmental Disabilities Services Office (DDSO) who steered contracts to favored bidders. The case was prosecuted by the Erie County District Attorney's Office.

The improprieties date back a decade, according to the Inspector General's 11-page report released today. In all, 165 maintenance projects at dozens of facilities were awarded to the same three vendors from 2001 to 2005.

State supervisors at the DDSO worked with private contractors to circumvent state procurement rules on construction and maintenance contracts, the investigation found. Once the supervisors chose a preferred contractor, the contractors would forge phony "competing" bids to make the process appear to comply with agency policy, which requires at least two competitive bids from separate vendors. The DDSO also awarded \$546,000 in flooring jobs to one contractor without seeking competing bids.

The supervisors testified that they took part in the scheme, not for financial gain, but to avoid paperwork. Faking competing bids was "just easier and quicker," the report states.

In all, six maintenance supervisors pleaded guilty to filing a false instrument. They are: Roman; Rodney Davie, 51, of Springville; Louis Marrara, 60, of Hamburg; David Kennedy, 58, of Elma; Thomas Schieber, 58, of Buffalo and William Bolger, 63, of Orchard Park.

Three contractors pleaded guilty to misdemeanor forgery. They are: Creative Concrete owner Russell “Bo” Tucker, 49, of Elma; Frank X. Leonard Builders’ owner Frank X. Leonard, 75, of Elma and Wilson G. Corah, 49, of Orchard Park, who owns B&B Construction.

OMRDD’s Western New York Development Disabilities Services Office provides housing, employment, and family support to individuals with developmental disabilities. It operates a residential facility in West Seneca and manages more than 150 community homes in Western New York.

The Inspector General concluded that OMRDD oversight of small maintenance contracts – the types fabricated by Western New York DDSO staff -- was “wholly inadequate” and recommended that OMRDD audit the 12 remaining DDSOs statewide for potential irregularities. Last month, a Central New York DDSO maintenance supervisor and two contractors were charged with felonies in a similar bid-rigging scheme.

As a result, OMRDD has comprehensively reviewed and overhauled its bidding process, tightening controls to ensure compliance with the law and agency policy and removing maintenance supervisors from taking part in contract awards.

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