



STATE OF NEW YORK
OFFICE OF THE STATE INSPECTOR GENERAL
Final Report
December 20, 2011

SUMMARY OF FINDINGS/RECOMMENDATIONS

The New York State Inspector General found that Jaidee Finn, an employee for the New York State Department of Motor Vehicles (DMV), improperly received travel expense reimbursement for costs she did not incur when she carpooled with other employees. DMV has initiated disciplinary action against Finn. The Inspector General recommended that DMV take steps to ensure that employees are aware of travel expense reimbursement rules, particularly with respect to carpooling.

ALLEGATION

On January 14, 2011, DMV reported to the Inspector General that it had received an allegation that three DMV employees falsely reported travel mileage for reimbursement. According to the complaint, the employees carpooled from their homes in the Buffalo area to the DMV Syracuse office in the summer of 2010, but then submitted travel expense reimbursement requests in which they each claimed expenses as if they had traveled separately.

SUMMARY OF INVESTIGATION

During the busier summer months, DMV periodically hires temporary employees, including Motor Vehicle License Examiners (MLVE), who, along with full-time MLVEs, administer driver license road tests and conduct other duties as needed. Temporary and full-time MVLEs in the Buffalo DMV office travel extensively throughout Western New York to the locations where the road tests and the audits are conducted. MVLEs receive their assignments by mail in advance and travel directly from their homes to their assigned duty posts for the day. MVLEs are not assigned state vehicles, but are required to use personal vehicles for travel to and from their designated work stations each day, and are reimbursed for the cost of such use.¹

¹ After the events at issue, DMV assigned two state vehicles to the Buffalo office, which are rotated every three months between the permanent MVLEs.

The Inspector General determined that on August 30, 2010, temporary MLVEs Providence Murray, Harold Suttell, and Jaidee Finn, all of whom were assigned to the Buffalo office, traveled together in Murray's personal car to the DMV office in Syracuse on official business. On the morning of the trip, Finn met Murray at Murray's home in Lancaster. Murray then drove her personal vehicle, with Finn, to Batavia to pick up Suttell, who had driven there from his home in his personal vehicle. The three employees then traveled together, in Murray's personal vehicle to Syracuse. After concluding their business in Syracuse, they traveled together back to Batavia, where Suttell was dropped off. Suttell returned to his home in his own vehicle. Murray then drove with Finn back to Murray's home, and Finn returned to her home. Murray paid for the gasoline for the trip, and there was no sharing of any costs.

DMV employees who incur personal costs as part of official travel are reimbursed for those costs upon submission of a travel voucher. The Inspector General found that with respect to the August 30, 2010 trip, Murray, Suttell, and Finn all submitted travel vouchers. Murray properly reported traveling in her personal vehicle from her home to Syracuse and back – a distance of 280 miles. Similarly, Suttell accurately reported using his personal car to travel from his home to Batavia and back. However, Finn falsely reported on her voucher that she had driven from her home to Syracuse and back, a distance of 306 miles. As a result, Finn improperly received a payment of \$153 (\$.50 per mile)² for costs she had not in fact incurred. In an interview with the Inspector General, Finn admitted that her request and receipt of the payment were improper, and stated that she was “absolutely willing” to repay this money. Finn stated that this was the only instance in which she had submitted an improper voucher, and the Inspector General's review of records found no evidence contradicting this assertion.

In addition, Finn told the Inspector General that, before the August 30, 2010 trip, she had received contradictory advice from others at DMV about claiming mileage reimbursements when carpooling. Finn stated that Murray, who, prior to employment as a temporary MVLE, had been a DMV supervisor, told her that it was improper and fraudulent to do so. On the other hand, according to Finn, her immediate supervisor told her to ignore Murray's advice and request reimbursement. Finn said that she improperly reported the mileage for the August 30, 2010 trip in order to “stay on [the supervisor's] good side.” The Inspector General interviewed the supervisor, who denied having a specific conversation with Finn regarding the August 30, 2010 trip and further denied having ever told anyone that it was proper to claim mileage expenses when carpooling in another employee's vehicle.

The Inspector General also interviewed the other MVLEs, both permanent and temporary, in the Buffalo Office. None of the MVLEs reported that the supervisor had ever advised them that it was acceptable for employees who carpool to each claim mileage reimbursement. All the MVLEs stated that carpooling rarely occurred because their homes are not close to one another and they generally worked alone while conducting road tests. Two employees, however, reported that the claiming of mileage

² The reimbursement rate is based on a calculation that includes the cost of gasoline and other expenses associated with operating a vehicle.

by passengers when carpooling had occurred at Buffalo's DMV in the past. One employee explained that, although carpooling had not occurred often during the last two years, it was previously "assumed to be okay" for everyone to claim the mileage. He further stated that it was neither encouraged nor discouraged by other DMV employees. None of the MVLEs interviewed, other than Finn, admitted that they, themselves, improperly submitted for mileage when they did not drive their own vehicle.

FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The Inspector General found that DMV employee Jaidee Finn falsely reported mileage on a travel voucher and improperly received reimbursement of \$153.00 for expenses she did not incur. DMV has commenced disciplinary proceedings against Finn.

The Inspector General recommended that DMV take steps to ensure that employees are aware of travel expense reimbursement rules, particularly with respect to carpooling.