

H. CARL McCALL
STATE COMPTROLLER



A.E. SMITH STATE OFFICE BUILDING
ALBANY, NEW YORK 12236

STATE OF NEW YORK
OFFICE OF THE STATE
COMPTROLLER

July 16, 1999

Dr. John W. Ryan
Chancellor
State University of New York
State University Plaza
Albany, N. Y. 12246

Re: Report 99-F-11

Dear Dr. Ryan:

Pursuant to the State Comptroller's authority as set forth in Article V, Section 1 of the State Constitution and Article II, Section 8 of the State Finance Law, we have reviewed the actions taken by officials of the State University of New York (SUNY) as of June 29, 1999, to implement the recommendations contained in our audit report, *State University of New York Controls Over Public Safety Staffing At Selected Campuses* (Report 96-S-61). Our report, which was issued on September 24, 1997, examined the effectiveness of SUNY's controls over public safety staffing to ensure that staffing is appropriate to meet the level and type of service campuses believe is required, and that overtime costs are minimized to the extent practical.

Background

There are 29 State-operated campuses within the SUNY system of higher education. Each campus maintains a Public Safety Office to provide a safe and secure campus environment. Officials at individual campuses have the authority to decide the size and composition of public safety staffing according to locally determined need. In 1996, SUNY employed over 650 public safety staff. During calendar year 1996, the total payroll cost for public safety staff was about \$22 million. Overtime pay accounted for \$2.3 million, or nearly 11 percent of the total payroll cost. As of December 1998 there were 657 public safety staff. During calendar year 1998, SUNY System Administration reported that the total payroll cost for public safety staff was \$26.4 million. Overtime pay accounted for \$2 million, or nearly 8 percent of the total payroll cost.

Summary Conclusions

In our prior audit, we examined controls and practices for public safety staffing at five campuses. We found that the campuses lacked documentation needed to assure that the necessary

public safety coverage was being provided. We also found that overtime expense for calendar year 1995 for all the SUNY campuses was the highest at Brooklyn, representing more than twice the SUNY System average of 11 percent of total public safety payroll for calendar years 1994 through 1996. In addition, we found that some campuses assigned professional staff to duties such as providing dispatch services and issuing parking permits, that could be performed by lower cost staff. In our follow-up review, we found that SUNY System Administration has taken steps to control the use of overtime. However, additional action is needed to encourage the campuses to have written public safety staffing plans that document how campus needs are being met with appropriate personnel.

Summary of Status of Prior Audit Recommendations

Of the three prior audit recommendations, SUNY officials have implemented two recommendations and have not implemented one recommendation.

Follow-Up Observations

Recommendation 1

SUNY System Administration should emphasize to campuses the need to have written public safety staffing plans documenting how campus needs are being met with appropriate personnel.

Status - Not Implemented

Agency Action - SUNY officials indicated to us that they agree that written public safety staffing plans would benefit the campuses. However, the officials told us that due to the time required to oversee legislative action to create the new University police legislation that became effective in January 1999, SUNY has not addressed this issue at the campuses and none of the campuses have prepared a written staffing plan. The officials stated that they intend to work with the campuses to develop staffing plans once they have complied with the requirements of the University police legislation.

Recommendation 2

SUNY System Administration should emphasize to the campuses the need to control overtime by exploring the possibility of filling vacant public safety staff positions, contracting for public safety staff, leaving less critical posts unattended when staff is not available and by using part-time staff to further control the cost of overtime.

Status - Implemented

Agency Action - SUNY Public Safety officials indicated to us that they have recently been working with the New York State Department of Civil Service to upgrade by three levels various positions in the campus public safety and security services title series. Officials believe that higher salaries will enhance officer recruitment and help reduce what they

describe as a high turnover rate of public safety staff, which in turn should decrease the need for overtime. In addition, officials are looking into the possibility of organizing public safety officers on a regional basis, where public safety officers could be assigned to work at more than just one campus. Officials further noted that they would prefer not to contract out for services because of the sensitive nature of campus public safety and the role of training that SUNY provides to meet the campuses' needs. Also, officials stated that the current civil service title for armed police officers at 20 campuses does not have a part-time officer provision, thus it would not be possible to use part-time staff in these titles.

Recommendation 3

SUNY System Administration should emphasize to campuses that to the extent possible, non-professional staff should be used to perform duties that do not require a trained peace officer.

Status - Implemented

Agency Action - Since our audit was performed, SUNY has expanded its use of the Campus Public Safety Officer 1 (CPSO) title to undertake a variety of tasks which do not require professional trained staff to perform. For example, CPSOs work primarily as desk officers performing communications related activities such as dispatching. When necessary, they also patrol SUNY buildings and facilities, enforce building regulations, maintain order and give directions to and answer questions for SUNY clients and visitors to assist them in finding their way. Officials pointed out that because CPSOs perform these tasks, professional staff can devote more of their time to police work. SUNY officials told us that SUNY Binghamton was the first campus to utilize this position, employing three CPSOs in late 1995. As of December 1998, 27 SUNY campuses reported employing a total of 29 CPSOs.

Major contributors to this report were William Nealon, Karen Bogucki, Joan de Paz and Richard Gerard.

We would appreciate your response to this report within 30 days, indicating any action planned or taken to address the unresolved matter discussed in this report. We also thank SUNY management and staff for the courtesies and cooperation extended to our auditors during this review.

Very truly yours,

Jerry Barber
Audit Director

cc: Charles Conaway