

STATE OF OHIO  
OFFICE OF THE INSPECTOR GENERAL

RANDALL J. MEYER, INSPECTOR GENERAL

REPORT OF  
INVESTIGATION



**AGENCY: OHIO DEPARTMENT OF ADMINISTRATIVE SERVICES  
OHIO DEPARTMENT OF REHABILITATION AND CORRECTION  
FILE ID NO.: 2012 CA-00032  
DATE OF REPORT: OCTOBER 2, 2012**

## The Office of the Ohio Inspector General..... The State Watchdog

*“Safeguarding integrity in state government”*

The Ohio Office of the Inspector General is authorized by state law to investigate alleged wrongful acts or omissions committed by state officers or state employees involved in the management and operation of state agencies. We at the Inspector General’s Office recognize that the majority of state employees and public officials are hardworking, honest, and trustworthy individuals. However, we also believe that the responsibilities of this Office are critical in ensuring that state government and those doing or seeking to do business with the State of Ohio act with the highest of standards. It is the commitment of the Inspector General’s Office to fulfill its mission of safeguarding integrity in state government. We strive to restore trust in government by conducting impartial investigations in matters referred for investigation and offering objective conclusions based upon those investigations.

Statutory authority for conducting such investigations is defined in *Ohio Revised Code §121.41* through *121.50*. A *Report of Investigation* is issued based on the findings of the Office, and copies are delivered to the Governor of Ohio and the director of the agency subject to the investigation. At the discretion of the Inspector General, copies of the report may also be forwarded to law enforcement agencies or other state agencies responsible for investigating, auditing, reviewing, or evaluating the management and operation of state agencies. The *Report of Investigation* by the Ohio Inspector General is a public record under *Ohio Revised Code §149.43* and related sections of *Chapter 149*. It is available to the public for a fee that does not exceed the cost of reproducing and delivering the report.

The Office of the Inspector General does not serve as an advocate for either the complainant or the agency involved in a particular case. The role of the Office is to ensure that the process of investigating state agencies is conducted completely, fairly, and impartially. The Inspector General’s Office may or may not find wrongdoing associated with a particular investigation. However, the Office always reserves the right to make administrative recommendations for improving the operation of state government or referring a matter to the appropriate agency for review.

The Inspector General’s Office remains dedicated to the principle that no public servant, regardless of rank or position, is above the law, and the strength of our government is built on the solid character of the individuals who hold the public trust.



STATE OF OHIO  
**OFFICE OF THE INSPECTOR GENERAL**  
RANDALL J. MEYER, INSPECTOR GENERAL

---

**REPORT OF INVESTIGATION**

**FILE ID NUMBER:** 2012 CA-00032

**SUBJECT NAME:** Gayle Blankenship  
Susan Jones

**POSITION:** State Purchasing Procurement Manager  
General Activities Therapist 2

**AGENCY:** Ohio Department of Administrative Services  
Ohio Department of Rehabilitation & Correction

**BASIS FOR INVESTIGATION:** Agency Request

**ALLEGATIONS:** Abuse of Office/Position

**INITIATED:** April 6, 2012

**DATE OF REPORT:** October 2, 2012

## **INITIAL ALLEGATION AND COMPLAINT SUMMARY**

In March 2012, the Office of the Ohio Inspector General received a complaint from the Ohio Department of Rehabilitation and Correction (ODRC) alleging Gayle Blankenship, a state purchasing procurement manager at the Ohio Department of Administrative Services (ODAS), improperly used her position for personal rather than state business reasons. Blankenship allegedly used her position to gain access to the Pickaway Correctional Institution (PCI) by: attempting to visit certain correctional facility inmates during her regular work hours for the state; circumventing PCI policies and procedures in order to attempt to send an unapproved gift to an inmate; and sending personal email and communications to PCI employees and inmates during work hours. Based on these allegations, officials at PCI suspended Blankenship's privilege to visit the institution. A preliminary inquiry was initially opened, and then, from a review of additional information, an investigation was opened on April 6, 2012.

During the course of the investigation, the Office of the Ohio Inspector General discovered PCI Corrections Officer Susan Jones allegedly abused her position by consenting to the delivery of a gift for an inmate and by aiding in the delivery of the gift sent in violation of PCI policies and procedures.

## **BACKGROUND**

### *Ohio Department of Administrative Services*

The Ohio Department of Administrative Services provides numerous services to state agencies including information technology, human resources, purchasing, fleet management, collective bargaining, and equal employment opportunity. These operations are funded through fees charged to agencies for the services provided, as well as General Revenue Funding. The Office of Procurement Services, a section of the General Services Division, provides supplies, services, and technology items via large scale state contracts. The office is also responsible for enforcing purchasing guidelines as established in state statutes.<sup>1</sup>

---

<sup>1</sup> Source: Legislative Services Commission biennial budget documents.

### *Ohio Department of Rehabilitation and Correction*

The Ohio Department of Rehabilitation and Correction is charged with the supervision of felony offenders in the custody of the state, including providing housing, following their release from incarceration, and monitoring the individuals through the parole authority. The department also oversees the community control sanction system that provides judges with sentencing options to reduce the inmate population. ODRC oversees numerous facilities throughout the state, including the Pickaway Correctional Institution (PCI). PCI was opened in 1984 and currently houses more than 2,000 inmates, with the majority classified as medium security. The institution provides various community services and industries, including the ODRC meat processing career center.<sup>2</sup>

Visitation dates and times are based on the last digit of the inmate's institution number. For example, those inmates with institution numbers ending in an even number can receive visitors on Mondays and those with an odd number have visitation on Fridays. Phone calls made by inmates may be monitored and/or recorded and can have a maximum duration of 15 minutes per call. Inmates can receive correspondence via regular mail or through an email system called JPay.<sup>3</sup> Correspondence, with the exception of legal communications, may be read or copied by the institution and is typically distributed within three working days. If mail is withheld, inmates will be notified. Gifts for inmates may be purchased through an approved online catalog and shipped directly to the institution. Gifts sent by way of unapproved third-parties will be denied and sent back at either the sender's or inmate's expense.<sup>4</sup>

### **INVESTIGATIVE SUMMARY**

#### *Allegation #1 – Visitation of inmates during state time*

The Ohio Department of Rehabilitation and Correction alleged Blankenship abused her position as a state purchasing procurement manager by attending a vendor tour of the Pickaway Correctional Institution campus in order to visit an inmate. The tour was being conducted to allow pest control service vendors to view the areas covered under a service agreement in a

---

<sup>2</sup> According to ODRC's website, the meat processing center allows ODRC to become more self-sufficient by providing meat products to all 32 institutions and provides job training to inmates.

<sup>3</sup> <http://www.jpays.com/>

<sup>4</sup> Source: ODRC website.

contract to be awarded by competitive bid. The contract was being administered by a contract analyst reporting to Blankenship at the Ohio Department of Administrative Services. According to officials at PCI, prior to the date of the visit, a list of individuals who would be on the tour was provided by ODAS. However, on the day of the September 13, 2011, visit, Blankenship and several additional vendors who were not on the list arrived at the institution.

On April 10, 2012, the Office of the Ohio Inspector General interviewed the PCI employee who conducted the ODAS tour. The PCI tour leader stated that toward the end of the tour, Blankenship insisted on visiting the meat processing center. While the PCI tour leader believed other vendors in the group were reluctant to spend further time and effort to make the detour, the tour leader decided it would be inappropriate to deny Blankenship's request because, as a senior ODAS representative, she was ultimately in charge of the contract. As a result, the group proceeded to outside of the meat processing center. The PCI tour leader stated Blankenship asked to see the actual processing floor. Another PCI employee escorted Blankenship to the door of the facility where she could see into the room, however, they did not enter. All the individuals interviewed who had attended the tour stated Blankenship was in sight of the group at all times and she did not appear to speak to any of the inmates.

The Office of the Ohio Inspector General obtained a list of inmates working in the meat processing center, and identified one inmate Blankenship frequently visited and who was working in the meat processing center at PCI during the time of the tour (hereafter referred to as Inmate X). On May 3, 2012, the Office of the Ohio Inspector General interviewed Gayle Blankenship. When asked as to her reason for attending the tour, Blankenship stated a subordinate ODAS employee administering the contract expressed some concern with the contract. Blankenship stated this particular employee often asked her to be present during site visits, but Blankenship went only when there was a problem with the contract or other conditions made it necessary for Blankenship to be there. Neither Blankenship nor the employee were able to identify what the problems were that necessitated Blankenship to be on the tour that day. On April 25, 2012, the Office of the Ohio Inspector General interviewed the employee Blankenship managed and confirmed Blankenship's assertions.

The Office of the Ohio Inspector General obtained from PCI officials a copy of a recorded phone conversation between Inmate X and Blankenship. The recording revealed Inmate X and Blankenship discussing the tour incident after Blankenship's visitation privileges at PCI were suspended. During the conversation, Inmate X appeared to be lecturing Blankenship about the impropriety of visiting the prison in her capacity as a state employee. Inmate X stated several times Blankenship probably should not have gone on the tour, and Blankenship's attendance could have been the reason why her visitation privileges were suspended.

The Office of the Ohio Inspector General also obtained a list of visitation logs from PCI showing instances when Blankenship was a visitor at the correctional facility. The dates and times shown in the logs corresponding to Blankenship's visits were compared to Blankenship's timesheets from July 2011 to the time of the investigation. With the exception of Blankenship's attendance at the vendor tour to PCI, there were no other instances when Blankenship's timesheet and PCI log records reflected she was visiting PCI during work hours.

Blankenship abused her position when asking for the group to be detoured to the meat processing plant. This could have presented a security risk to the facility as Blankenship was not on the original visitors list and she was aware Inmate X was working there and could have met him outside the normal visiting hours and location. PCI officials were not aware of her relationship with the inmate at the time of the tour.

*Allegation #2 – Sending an unapproved gift to an inmate*

On February 6, 2012, Gayle Blankenship sent an email from her personal email account during work hours to the PCI warden about the process for ordering a left-handed guitar for an inmate. In the email, Blankenship asked if there was any paperwork involved, and stated she did not want to ship the gift before finding whether or not she would be permitted to send the guitar to Inmate X. The warden responded, explaining Blankenship's request was forwarded to Pamela Braddy, the recreation director at PCI.

In speaking with Inmate X, he stated that he asked Pamela Braddy about purchasing the guitar, as Blankenship had not received a response from Braddy. Inmate X further explained Braddy

told him to speak with Susan Jones, an employee at PCI who reported to Braddy. According to Inmate X, Jones told him he could order the guitar from American Music Supply (AMS) and have it shipped to Jones at the PCI address. Inmate X stated he received a “memo” from Jones outlining the shipping information. Blankenship stated she did not know who Jones was nor had Blankenship spoken to Jones about the purchase; all of the information was passed on to Blankenship from Inmate X during phone conversations. Based on a review of communications between Blankenship and the Inmate X, the guitar appears to have been purchased around February 13, 2012.

On or about February 23, 2012, PCI received a package addressed in care of “Ms. Jones” from American Music Supply. Further review of the documents purportedly enclosed with the package at the time of delivery revealed the purchaser as Blankenship. The package contained a guitar and accessories valued at approximately \$2,000. PCI officials were able to determine, based on the email in February from Blankenship to the warden, the guitar was intended for Inmate X. Packages sent to PCI are searched to ensure contraband and unapproved items do not enter the facility.

The Office of the Ohio Inspector General interviewed Inmate X and examined the memo Inmate X stated he had received from Jones, which was still in his possession. The memo was, in fact, a piece of paper handwritten in ink with only PCI’s address and “c/o Ms. Jones.” The memo did not have a signature, a date, or statement indicating the purpose. On May 3, 2012, the Office of the Ohio Inspector General interviewed Susan Jones. Jones inspected the memo and acknowledged it was her handwriting, but denied giving the inmate permission to purchase the guitar. When asked as to why she would have given Inmate X a piece of paper with that information on it, Jones could not recall either giving it to Inmate X or why. However, Jones stated it would not be unusual for her to provide the proper address block information to inmates because the inmates use musical instruments in the recreation center and purchase basic supplies such as guitar picks or strings using their own funds. Jones further stated inmates typically order items from AMS and address the shipment to PCI in care of Jones. Though Jones confirmed the handwriting on the memo was hers and explained that she has provided to inmates information

as to how deliveries should be addressed, Jones denied giving the memo to Inmate X and any permission or direction to either Inmate X or Blankenship to order the guitar.

When contacted by the Office of the Ohio Inspector General, AMS provided a list of seven purchases shipped to PCI in care of Jones, of which one purchase was the guitar and the other six purchases were general supplies. AMS confirmed the guitar purchase was sent to the attention of Inmate X. With the exception of the document Inmate X produced and the AMS purchase confirmation, the Office of the Ohio Inspector General was unable to locate any other material evidence.

*Allegation #3 – Personal emails and phone calls during business hours*

The Office of the Ohio Inspector General received from ODRC officials email correspondence between Blankenship and the department, as well as JPay's email correspondence between Blankenship and various inmates at PCI. The Office of the Ohio Inspector General compared the date and time of each email against Blankenship's timesheets to determine whether any were sent during work hours. The analysis showed 244 email and JPay messages were sent during work hours between September 2011 and April 2012. An analysis to determine how many hours Blankenship spent writing these emails during work hours, and the loss for wages paid by the state could not be calculated.

In addition, the Office of the Ohio Inspector General obtained a list of phone calls made by various inmates to Blankenship's personal phone numbers between September 2011 and April 2012. A second comparison was made noting the date and time of the calls against Blankenship's timesheets. The analysis found that of the 1,713 phone calls made or attempted, 479 (27.6 percent) occurred during her work hours and totaled 58 hours and 28 minutes.

When discussing the initial findings regarding the number of emails and calls made during working hours, Blankenship's supervisor seemed surprised. She stated she did not notice Blankenship spending an excessive amount of time on her cell phone and was unaware of her computer usage as her office is not near Blankenship's. Her supervisor said Blankenship

finished her job assignments on time, if not before deadlines, and she did not see a decline in quality in work based on these other activities.

## **CONCLUSION**

In light of the allegations provided to the Office of the Ohio Inspector General, officials at Pickaway Correctional Institution temporarily suspended Gayle Blankenship's privilege to visit the facility. Blankenship wrote a letter to the warden questioning why her visits were suspended. In this letter, Blankenship wrote she had informed her supervisor of her personal relationships with several of the inmates, and her employer had agreed to restrict her access to the facility for work purposes. However, there was neither a record of any restrictions in Blankenship's personnel file, nor were the ODAS legal division or Blankenship's direct supervisor aware any restrictions had been made regarding Blankenship's visits to PCI. Both Blankenship and her direct supervisor stated the conversation would have occurred with the director of state purchasing and was not relayed to anyone else.

As the employee in charge of the pest control contract, Blankenship was routinely invited on site visits, and it would not have been out of the ordinary for Blankenship to accept the invitation. Blankenship stated while there were some concerns about the contract prompting her to be on the tour, Blankenship admitted to being curious about the inside of the facility where the inmates were housed. The last minute decision to attend the site visit presented a potential security risk for PCI and given her personal relationship with the Inmate X, Blankenship should have immediately notified her direct supervisor of the situation and allowed ODAS and ODRC to come to a mutual agreement on whether Blankenship should attend the tour, and if so, under what conditions. By requesting a detour of the proscribed tour to a location within PCI she knew Inmate X was working, Blankenship created a potential security risk to the institution as PCI officials were unaware of her relationship with the inmate at the time.

**Accordingly, the Office of the Ohio Inspector General finds reasonable cause to believe a wrongful act or omission occurred in this instance.**

As a purchasing supervisor, Blankenship was aware of ODAS purchasing policies and procedures, and she properly contacted the warden to determine the process for ordering the guitar for an inmate, as it would have been outside the normal purchasing process. However, when Blankenship had not heard back from either the warden or recreation director Pamela Braddy, Inmate X spoke to Braddy directly and was told to speak to Jones. According to Inmate X, Jones approved the purchase and provided a piece of paper with shipping instructions. Jones confirmed giving Inmate X the piece of paper but denied it was permission to purchase the guitar. As all packages to PCI inmates are searched, by having the guitar sent directly to an ODRC employee, there was the possibility the package would not have been searched and eventually delivered to the inmate. However, neither Blankenship nor Inmate X indicated they were attempting to circumvent proper procedures and insisted they were only following the instructions as provided by Jones.

**Accordingly, the Office of the Ohio Inspector General does not find reasonable cause to believe a wrongful act or omission occurred in this instance.**

A review of the emails Blankenship sent to inmates during working hours over a six-month period totaled 141. Blankenship also sent 11 emails from her work email or from her personal email account to officials at ODRC regarding personal matters. The emails to inmates were not quick messages and would have taken time to compose, which Blankenship would be doing in place of her work. In fact, she acknowledged she was at work numerous times throughout the emails. In addition to the emails, she spoke on her personal cell phone to these inmates during working hours a total of 58 hours and 28 minutes over the same six-month period. The phone calls equated to a potential loss of wages to the state of \$1,893.06.<sup>5</sup>

**Accordingly, the Office of the Ohio Inspector General finds reasonable cause to believe a wrongful act or omission occurred in this instance.**

---

<sup>5</sup> This amount was determined by multiplying the 58 hours and 28 minutes Blankenship was using her personal telephone by Blankenship's hourly rate of pay of \$32.36.

### **RECOMMENDATION(S)**

The Office of the Ohio Inspector General makes the following recommendations and asks the Ohio Department of Administrative Services to respond within 60 days with a plan detailing how the recommendations will be implemented. The Ohio Department of Administrative Services should:

- 1) Review department and state government policies limiting personal or non-state business use of state resources, emphasizing telephone, computer, and email systems.
- 2) Review the actions of all employees involved to determine whether their conduct warrants further administrative action.
- 3) Confer with and reach a resolution acceptable to officials at the Ohio Department of Rehabilitation and Correction to limit or ban visits at PCI or any other correction facility by Blankenship in her official capacity as an ODAS employee.

### **REFERRALS**

The Office of the Ohio Inspector General will forward a copy of this report to the Franklin County and City of Columbus Prosecutor's Office for their review.



STATE OF OHIO  
**OFFICE OF THE INSPECTOR GENERAL**

---

RANDALL J. MEYER, INSPECTOR GENERAL

**NAME OF REPORT: Ohio Department of Administrative  
Services  
Ohio Department of Rehabilitation and  
Correction**  
**FILE ID #: 2012 CA-00032**

**KEEPER OF RECORDS CERTIFICATION**

**This is a true and correct copy of the report which is required to be prepared  
by the Office of the Ohio Inspector General pursuant to Section 121.42 of the  
Ohio Revised Code.**

**Jill Jones  
KEEPER OF RECORDS**

**CERTIFIED  
October 2, 2012**

*MAILING ADDRESS*

OFFICE OF THE INSPECTOR GENERAL  
JAMES A. RHODES STATE OFFICE TOWER  
30 EAST BROAD STREET – SUITE 2940  
COLUMBUS, OH 43215-3414

*TELEPHONE*

(614) 644-9110

*IN STATE TOLL- FREE*

(800) 686-1525

*FAX*

(614) 644-9504

*E-MAIL*

OIG\_WATCHDOG@OIG.STATE.OH.US

*INTERNET*

WATCHDOG.OHIO.GOV