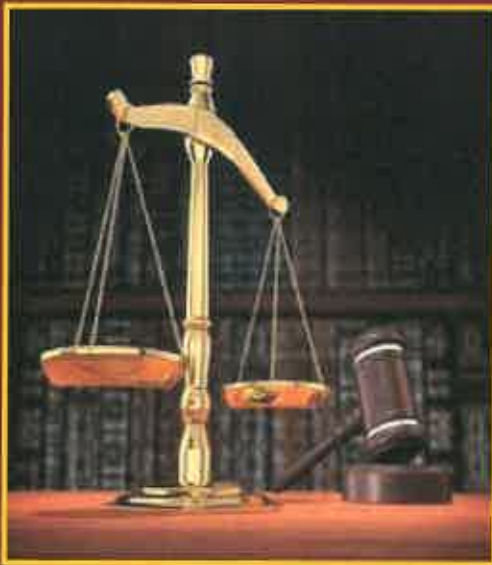




DIVISION OF INSPECTOR GENERAL

KEN BURKE, CPA
CLERK OF THE CIRCUIT COURT AND COMPTROLLER
PINELLAS COUNTY, FLORIDA

FOLLOW-UP AUDIT OF CLERK OF THE CIRCUIT COURT AND COMPTROLLER SELF HELP CENTERS' SERVICES REVENUE COLLECTION



Ken Burke
Clerk of the Circuit Court
Self Help Center



Self Help Center Partners



**Community
Law Program**



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Hector Collazo Jr.
Inspector General/Chief Audit Executive

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JULY 24, 2014
REPORT NO. 2014-24



Ken Burke, CPA

CLERK OF THE CIRCUIT COURT AND COMPTROLLER
PINELLAS COUNTY, FLORIDA

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July 24, 2014

The Honorable Ken Burke
Clerk of the Circuit Court and Comptroller

We have conducted a Follow-Up Audit of Clerk of the Circuit Court and Comptroller Self Help Centers' Services Revenue Collection. The objectives of our review were to determine the implementation status of our previous recommendations.

Of the four recommendations contained in the audit report, we determined that three have been implemented and one has not been implemented. The status of each recommendation is presented in this follow-up review. We commend management for implementing three of our recommendations and continue to encourage management to fully implement the remaining recommendation.

We appreciate the cooperation shown by the staff of the Clerk of the Circuit Court and Comptroller Self Help Centers during the course of this review.

Respectfully Submitted,

Hector Collazo Jr.
Inspector General/Chief Audit Executive

cc: Myriam Irizarry, Chief Deputy Director/General Counsel, Court and Operational Services
Connie Daniels, Director, Court and Operational Services
Claretha N. Harris, Chief Deputy Director, Finance Division



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INTRODUCTION

Scope and Methodology

We conducted a follow-up audit of the Clerk of the Circuit Court and Comptroller (Clerk) Self Help Centers' Services Revenue Collection. The purpose of our follow-up review is to determine the status of previous recommendations for improvement.

The purpose of the original audit was to:

- 1) Determine if the Self Help Centers' fees submitted online and at each location were appropriately recorded in the General Ledger and timely deposited to the County bank account.
- 2) Determine if there are sufficient internal controls over the revenue collection process.

To determine the current status of our previous recommendations, we surveyed and/or interviewed management to determine the actual actions taken to implement recommendations for improvement. We performed limited testing to verify the process of the recommendations for improvement.

Our follow-up audit was conducted in accordance with the *International Standards for the Professional Practice of Internal Auditing* and the *Principles and Standards for Offices of Inspector General*, and, accordingly, included such tests of records and other auditing procedures, as we considered necessary in the circumstances. Our follow-up testing was performed during the month of April 2014. The original audit period was October 1, 2011 through August 31, 2012. However, transactions and processes reviewed were not limited by the audit period.

Overall Conclusion

Of the four recommendations in the report, we determined that three were implemented, and one was not implemented. We commend management for implementation of three of our recommendations and continue to encourage management to fully implement the remaining recommendation.

Status

OFI NO.	PREVIOUS RECOMMENDATION	IMPLEMENTATION STATUS				
		Implemented	Acceptable Alternative	Partially Implemented	Not Implemented	No Longer Applicable
1	<i>Customers Can Only Schedule Appointments Online For The St. Petersburg And Downtown Clearwater Self Help Centers’ Locations But Not The North County Office.</i>					
	Management develop options (seek funding sources) to update the current scheduling software to include online appointments for the North County location.				✓	
2	<i>The Self Help Centers’ Website Does Not Offer Clear Directions On How To Schedule An Appointment For The North County Location.</i>					
	Management update the Self Help Centers’ webpage to include clear directions on how to make an appointment at the North County location.	✓				
3	<i>Intranet Appointment Calendar For The Self Help Centers Is Accessible To All County Employees With Network Log-On.</i>					
	A. Remove log-in and password information for the online scheduling calendar from the Intranet.	✓				
	B. Consult with BTS to change the security and allow only Self Help Centers’ staff to access the scheduling calendar.	✓				

Background

The Pinellas County Clerk of the Circuit Court and Comptroller (Clerk) Self Help Centers were created to assist Pinellas County citizens who do not hire a private attorney and are representing themselves in court. The Clerk's Self Help Centers are the result of a partnership between the Clerk's office, Sixth Judicial Circuit, the Community Law Program, and the Clearwater Bar Association Foundation to offer affordable legal services to the citizens of Pinellas County. The Self Help Centers offer affordable legal assistance to the citizens of Pinellas County. The Self Help Centers provide the following services:

- Scheduling an appointment to consult with an attorney for a minimum of \$15 for 15 minutes (*Attorneys may assist with Family Law, Small Claims, and Landlord/Tenant matters ONLY*).
- Purchasing forms and packets for civil court actions.
- Notarizing documents.
- Making copies.

To accommodate citizens, the Self Help Centers offer three locations throughout Pinellas County:

- St. Petersburg Judicial Building, 545 First Avenue North, St. Petersburg
- Clearwater Law Library, 324 S. Ft. Harrison Ave., Clearwater
- North County Branch, 29582 U.S. 19 North, Clearwater

For the convenience of the customers, the Self Help Centers offer online scheduling of attorney consultation appointments.

Established in 1994, the Louis M. Brown Award, which is awarded annually, honors programs and projects that creatively contribute to the delivery of legal services, information, and representation to individuals of middle class and moderate incomes with unmet legal needs.

The Pinellas County Clerk of the Circuit Court and Comptroller's Self Help Centers were selected as the recipient of the 2011 Louis M. Brown Award for Legal Access by the American Bar Association's Standing Committee on the Delivery of Legal Services.

Recognition was given to the Self Help Centers because of the:

- Unique partnership between court and private bar
- Innovative approach to scheduling attorney consultations
- It offers an exemplary model of affordable legal services programming

Ken Burke, Clerk of the Circuit Court and Comptroller, said:

“These people would have never had this opportunity to get help without the Self Help Center. We are really proud of the service and what it offers to the public. The best part of my job is reading the comment cards and seeing how appreciative people are of the Self Help Center. And the best part about it is that it does not cost the taxpayer any money.”

The Self Help Centers have assisted over 12,200 individuals since they opened the doors in the first two locations in October 2007 and the third location in April 2010.

STATUS OF RECOMMENDATIONS

This section reports our follow-up on actions taken by management on the Recommendations for Improvement in our original audit of the Clerk of the Circuit Court and Comptroller Self Help Centers' Services Revenue Collection. The recommendations contained herein are those of the original audit, followed by the current status of the recommendations.

1. Customers Can Only Schedule Appointments Online For The St. Petersburg And Downtown Clearwater Self Help Centers' Locations But Not The North County Office.

The current software developed and maintained by Visual Government Solutions, LLC does not provide an option to make an online appointment for the North County location. Since the introduction of the scheduling software, the Clerk has opened the North County Self Help Center. However, the software has not been updated to offer the North County location appointments. The Self Help Centers' management researched the option of adding the North County location to the scheduling software, but the cost of the modification prevented them from doing so. Consequently, customers may spend their time searching for the location that is not currently available for the online scheduling.

We understand that this program is not funded with tax revenues and the goal is to provide low cost legal services to the citizens of Pinellas County; however, the scheduling software should offer appointments for all the Self Help Centers' locations in order to better serve their customers.

We recommended management develop options (seek funding sources) to update the current scheduling software to include online appointments for the North County location.

Status:

Not Implemented. Management stated that they are in the planning phases of the new on-line calendaring system.

2. The Self Help Centers' Website Does Not Offer Clear Directions On How To Schedule An Appointment For The North County Location.

Scheduling appointments for the North County Self Help Center's location currently can only be made by phone or in person. The Clerk's website has not been updated to inform customers how to schedule an appointment at the Self Help Center's North County location.

Customers maneuver through the website until they find the scheduling software, which will not allow them to schedule appointments for the North County location. Then they are forced to exit the application and go back to the main webpage to search for the instructions on how to make an appointment for the North County location. Since there are no such instructions, customers eventually have to call the Self Help Centers. It is imperative to provide clear and easily visible direction for the customers visiting the Self Help Centers' website to schedule services.

We recommended management update the Self Help Centers' webpage to include clear directions on how to make an appointment at the North County location.

Status:

Implemented. Management updated the Self Help Centers' webpage to include clear directions on how to make an appointment at the North County location.

3. Intranet Appointment Calendar For The Self Help Centers Is Accessible To All County Employees With Network Log-On.

Any County employee with network log-on authority can access, view, and possibly schedule appointments on the Self Help Centers' calendar. This on-line access weakens the internal controls over the revenue collection process by bypassing the automated control for payment receipt on the website.

Appointment scheduling instructions posted on the Intranet and available to anyone with County network log-on access allows improper access to the appointment scheduling calendar. Therefore, any County employee having network log-on is able to schedule an appointment on the Self Help Centers' scheduling calendar without the Self Help Centers' staff knowledge and without submitting a payment. Appointment information in the Self Help Centers' scheduling calendar including customer names, phone numbers, and reason for the appointment (divorce, child support, etc.) are unprotected.

The Self Help Centers' appointment calendar with the customer's information should not be available on-line to all County employees with County log-on ability. In addition, only the Self Help Centers' staff and the customers should have the ability to schedule appointments in the Self Help Centers' appointment calendar.

We recommended management:

- A. Remove log-in and password information for the online scheduling calendar from the Intranet.
- B. Consult with BTS to change the security and allow only Self Help Centers' staff to access the scheduling calendar.

Status:

- A. Implemented.**
- B. Implemented.**



DIVISION OF INSPECTOR GENERAL

KEN BURKE, CPA
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& COMPTROLLER
PINELLAS COUNTY, FLORIDA

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