



*State of Louisiana*

**OFFICE OF**

**STATE INSPECTOR GENERAL**

**RAPIDES PARISH OFFICE OF ECONOMIC AND  
WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT**

**Report by**

**Inspector General Bill Lynch**

**Prepared for**

**Governor M.J. "Mike" Foster, Jr.**

**September 17, 1999**

**File No. 1-99-0094**



*State of Louisiana*

**OFFICE OF  
STATE INSPECTOR GENERAL**

**Rapides Parish Office of Economic and  
Workforce Development**

**August 27, 1999**

**Report by**

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**Inspector General Bill Lynch**

**Approved by**

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**Governor M.J. "Mike" Foster, Jr.**

**File No. 1-99-0094**

# Rapides Parish Office of Economic and Workforce Development

The Rapides Parish Office of Economic and Workforce Development improperly paid educational costs of \$471 for an employee who enrolled but failed to complete courses during 1997-98. The agency's policy for paying educational costs requires employees to complete and pass a course in order to obtain reimbursement.

The employee attended school during normal work hours although the agency's policy requires that attendance by employees be on their own time.

## Background

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The Rapides Parish Office of Economic and Workforce Development is located in Alexandria, and is a department of the Rapides Parish Police Jury. It has been operating since 1972 and currently has 39 employees.

The Rapides Parish Police Jury receives funding from several federal programs including the Job Training Partnership Act through the Louisiana Department of Labor. Funding from the JTPA program is distributed to disadvantaged and dislocated populations in Louisiana through 18 Service Delivery Areas in the state. The Rapides Parish Police Jury serves as the grant recipient for JTPA funds for its area, and the Office of Economic and Workforce Development administers those funds for the Police Jury.

## Improper Payment of Education Expenses

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The Rapides Parish Police Jury Personnel Policy and Procedures Manual, adopted May 12, 1998, Section 4.2(E) entitled Training Expense, requires that receipts for registration, books, and materials, along with copies of grades indicating the attainment of a "C" average or higher should be submitted for reimbursement at the completion of courses.

The JTPA does not have a specific rule governing educational costs for employees, but defers to the grant recipient, which in this case is the Police Jury.

Anna Sweat, a supervisor in the Office of Economic and Workforce Development, began taking a computer science course on Aug. 25, 1997, and withdrew prior to completion of the course on Sept. 24, 1997. Tuition for the course was \$120, and the cost of the book was \$43, for a total of \$163. In October 1998, Ms. Sweat withdrew early from two courses with a cost for tuition and fees of \$308. Total cost for all early withdrawals from courses enrolled was \$471.

Ms. Sweat should have paid for her courses and submitted receipts for reimbursement after the courses were completed. Instead, education expenses for Ms. Sweat were made directly to LSU-A from JTPA funds without complying with this requirement.

The president of the Rapides Parish Police Jury stated that the jurors were not aware that Ms. Sweat had not completed all the courses she enrolled in, and that she would be required to make reimbursement to JTPA for the dropped courses.

## Questionable Payroll Costs

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Section 4.2 E (2)(b) of the Police Jury personnel policy and procedures manual requires that all coursework approved by the board must be scheduled after work hours.

Ms. Sweat used an estimated 285 work hours during six semesters, from January, 1997, through October, 1998, resulting in questionable payroll costs of \$4,014.

Donald Wilmore, the current president, and Richard Billings, the past president of the Rapides Parish Police Jury, stated that jurors were not told and did not discuss details about what times Ms. Sweat would be taking courses. Furthermore, both stated that they were not aware of the requirement that education courses must be taken after work hours, and would have voted to exempt Ms. Sweat from that requirement if it had been brought to the jury's attention. They stated that it is common practice to permit employees to further their education during normal work hours.

According to Ms. Sweat, she was allowed by management to make up work hours missed to attend classes by adopting a flex-time schedule. However, the Police Jury's personnel policy disallows make-up time and has no provision for flex-time.

*Conclusions:*

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1. The Office of Economic and Workforce Development paid for tuition, fees, and books for three courses which were never completed by Ms. Sweat, resulting in \$471 of improper costs being charged to the Job Training Partnership Act within the Louisiana Department of Labor.
2. The Office of Economic and Workforce Development authorized Ms. Sweat to attend classes at LSU-A during normal work hours, resulting in an estimated \$4,014 of questionable costs being charged to the Job Training Partnership Act within the Louisiana Department of Labor.

*Recommendations:*

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1. The Department of Labor should seek reimbursement of \$471 in improper costs related to educational expenses paid for Ms. Sweat and charged to the Job Training Partnership Act by the Office of Economic and Workforce Development.
2. The Department of Labor should review this report regarding the estimated \$4,014 of questionable employee costs and take the appropriate actions.

*Management Response:*

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See Attached.

BL/PCW/fs

File No. 1 – 99 - 0094



**OFFICE OF  
ECONOMIC & WORKFORCE  
DEVELOPMENT**

Terry G. Bounds  
Executive Director

5608 COLISEUM BLVD. P. O. BOX 7556 ALEXANDRIA, LA 71306

Telephone (318) 448-1591  
Fax (318) 442-7834  
1-888-448-1591

Jan Haworth, Deputy Director

Kay Smith, LaJET/WtW Coordinator

August 27, 1999

Bill Lynch  
State Inspector General  
Office of State Inspector General  
P.O. Box 94095  
Baton Rouge, LA 70804-9095

In reply to:  
File No. 1-99-0094

Dear Mr. Lynch:

In response to the draft report, I Anna Sweat would like to give comments on the stated allegations/results. In the spring of 1997 and after discussion with Jan Haworth, JTPA Deputy Director, I enrolled in classes pursuing a Computer Information Technology degree. These courses would strengthen my computer skills therefore, would enhance my job performance as a Management Information System Supervisor. Due to severe depression after the death of my husband and adjustment to single parenting, I encountered much difficulty in the course entitled Computer Science, during the fall of 97. As a result I dropped the course. I notified Terry Bounds, Director of Office of Economic & Workforce Development at the JTPA office after this occurred. There were no discussions of refunding JTPA after he was made aware of my academic status.

Determined to overcome my depression, I decided to continue my Computer Information Technology course work. I enrolled and completed the next semester course with success, therefore, I continued to take courses. The next semester more family crisis occurred and again depression began to affect my ability to perform academically to my fullest potential. As a result I dropped both Physical Science courses after recommendation by the instructor. The second Physical Science course required was to be taken after or concurrent with Physical Science I, therefore both had to be dropped. At that time Jan Haworth, Deputy Director of JTPA was made aware of my academic status. Again, no discussion of refund was mentioned. As a result of my mental stability and increasing volume of demands at the workplace I decided not to enroll the next semester. After consulting with my psychologist, he also concurred with my decision.

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After discussion with Terry Bounds, Director of Office of Economic & Workforce Development, and Donald Wilmore, Rapides Parish Police Jury President, a decision was made for me to refund \$471.00 to JTPA. There were no other options considered other than repayment. Therefore, I am consulting with the finance director, Carol Stanford, to set up a payment plan.

In response to the estimated 285 work hours used during the duration of my course work, I strongly feel that compensation exceeded this estimate by no lunch hours and the many flex hours which I accumulated after normal work days. This included numerous evening and weekend hours for which I was never compensated.

Regards,



Anna Sweat  
Client Service Rep. Coordinator

DONALD H. WILMORE  
President

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DISTRICT A  
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PINEVILLE, LA 71360

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300 PINE GROVE DRIVE  
PINEVILLE, LA 71360

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190 DONNIE PRICE ROAD  
DEVILLE, LA 71328

DISTRICT D  
MYRON K. LAWSON  
3626 ELEVENTH STREET  
ALEXANDRIA, LA 71302



DISTRICT E  
DONALD H. WILMORE  
97 TEXADA ROAD  
BOYCE, LA 71409

DISTRICT F  
JOE FULLER  
2053 WISE STREET  
ALEXANDRIA, LA 71301

DISTRICT G  
RICHARD L. NUNNALLY  
608 SWEETBRIAR DRIVE  
ALEXANDRIA, LA 71303

DISTRICT H  
RICHARD W. BILLINGS  
3386 LA 112  
FOREST HILL, LA 71430

DISTRICT I  
SCOTT PERRY, JR.  
4324 ENGLAND DRIVE  
ALEXANDRIA, LA 71303

August 25, 1999

Mr. Bill Lynch  
State Inspector General  
Office of State Inspector General  
P O Box 94095  
Baton Rouge LA 70804-9095

RE: File No. 1-99-0094

Dear Mr. Lynch:

I am in receipt of your draft report concerning an audit of specific policies and procedures of the Rapides Parish Office of Economic and Workforce Development. As President of the Rapides Parish Police Jury, I appreciate the opportunity to provide input prior to submittal of a formal report.

Your audit report questioned payment of education expenses and attendance of classes at LSUA by an employee of the Office of Economic and Workforce Development, a department of the Rapides Parish Police Jury.

The Rapides Parish Police Jury encourages employees to enroll in training courses and education classes that will upgrade their job skills and allow them to better perform their jobs. The Police Jury authorized the enrollment of Anna Sweat, MIS supervisor in a computer curriculum at LSUA and approved payment of tuition and books.

After reviewing the facts it appears that we have arrived at this point due to a lot of confusion over whether or not an old Policy and Personnel Procedures Manual that was adopted by the Police Jury in 1988 still applies, even though the parish adopted a classified civil service system in 1994. Many department heads and police jurors were under the impression that once the civil service system was adopted and its rules and regulations were promulgated, that the old manual

TELEPHONE  
318-473-6660

P.O. BOX 1150  
ALEXANDRIA, LOUISIANA 71309-1150

FAX  
318-473-6670

Regular monthly meetings on second Monday of each month at 3:00 p.m.

Internet: <http://www.rppj.com>

no longer applied. I can see where this argument could be debated either way and I want to assure you that steps will be taken to rectify this situation so that a possibility of double standards will be alleviated.

Mr. Lynch, even though Ms. Sweat attended class during the work day, she was on a flexed schedule and still worked a minimum of 40 hours per week. We have taken steps to recoup the \$471 fees for tuition and books for the classes dropped.

If I could be of any additional assistance, please do not hesitate to call.

Respectfully yours,

A handwritten signature in cursive script, appearing to read "D. Wilmore".

Donald H. Wilmore, President  
Rapides Parish Police Jury



OFFICE OF  
**ECONOMIC & WORKFORCE  
DEVELOPMENT**

Terry G. Bounds  
Executive Director

5608 COLISEUM BLVD. P. O. BOX 7556 ALEXANDRIA, LA 71306

Telephone (318) 448-1591  
Fax (318) 442-7834  
1-888-448-1591

Jan Haworth, *Deputy Director*

Kay Smith, *LaJET / WtW Coordinator*

August 25, 1999

Bill Lynch  
State Inspector General  
Office of State Inspector General  
P.O. Box 94095  
Baton Rouge, La. 70804-9095

RE: File No. 1-99-0094

Dear Mr. Lynch:

Thank you for the opportunity to respond to the findings in your draft report concerning an audit of specific policies and procedures of the Rapides Parish Office of Economic and Workforce Development. This report questioned payment of education expenses and attendance of school by an employee during normal work hours.

These findings were based on an "old" Rapides Parish Police Jury Personnel Policy and Procedures Manual that was adopted in May 12, 1988. Section 4.2 (E) entitled Training Expenses, requiring that receipts for registration, books, and materials, along with copies of grades indicating the attainment of a "C" average or higher should be submitted for reimbursement at the completion of courses. Section 4.2 E (2)(b) stating that course work approved must be scheduled after work hours. The Rapides Parish Police Jury adopted a classified civil service system on June 25, 1994. It was my understanding, and it is my belief that by adopting a classified civil service system, all other personnel policy and procedures were superseded, therefore making the old Personnel Policy and Procedures Manual obsolete and not applicable to civil service employees.

**Finding Number 1: Improper Payment of Education Expenses**

The Office of Economic and Workforce Development believes that staff capacity building is necessary if we are to provide the best service possible to our clients. It was determined that Anna Sweat, Management Information System supervisor would benefit from enrollment in a computer curriculum at LSUA to better upgrade her skills. This training would ultimately result in Anna being a better asset to this agency by utilizing those skills.

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The Police Jury authorized enrollment in the computer curriculum at LSUA for Anna and authorized payment of tuition and books. She enrolled in the curriculum, successfully completing several classes, but was eventually forced to drop three classes due to a personal family tragedy. The cost of the tuition and books for the three classes dropped was \$471.00. While I feel that the training and payment of tuition and books prior to completion were justified, I understand the rationale behind questioned cost for incomplete classes. I met with Anna and our finance director yesterday to begin the process for recouping those cost. Anna has agreed to reimburse the agency for the tuition and books for dropped classes in the amount of \$471.00.

Finding number 2: Questionable Payroll Cost

Let me first reiterate that I do not believe that the "old" Personnel Policy and Procedures Manual applies to civil service employees. Secondly, even if the manual was in effect, I contend that no violation of policy existed because Anna did attend classes after work hours due to the fact that she was working flex time during her enrollment at LSUA. Prior to enrollment in the classes Anna understood that she would have to make up the time in class by altering her work schedule. LSUA only offered the computer curriculum classes during the normal school day. Anna attended classes in the morning and usually was in the office fifteen minutes after her class ended. Her workday began when she arrived at the office. She would always stay at her workstation until she completed an eight hour work day, many times working past her required time until late into the evening. The workforce center has been evolving over the last few years into a One Stop facility for universal access by the public. It is not unusual for staff to work late hours during the week or on weekends to better serve the public. Anna spent many weekends at the office assisting with the Summer Youth Program. Due to being a salaried employee Anna was not compensated for any time beyond her normal forty hour work week. Therefore I must take exception to this finding.

It is easy for me to see where the confusion over the authenticity of the "old" Personnel Policy and Procedures Manual could lead to this misunderstanding. I have discussed this matter with Mr. Donald Wilmore, President of the Rapides Parish Police Jury and he agrees that the police Jury needs to take steps to clear up this issue. It is my understanding that the police jury will abolish the old set of policy and procedures and replace them with an updated version that aligns with the civil service policies.

Please be assured that we are aware of the existence of the possible double set of policy and procedures and will address this in any personnel issues until we can rectify the situation. If I can be of further assistance, please don't hesitate to contact me.

Sincerely,



Terry G. Bounds, Director  
Office of Economic and Workforce Development