

Compliance Audit

of the

Commonwealth of Pennsylvania
Department of Public Welfare
Dauphin County Assistance Office

Audit Period

July 19, 2003 to October 21, 2005



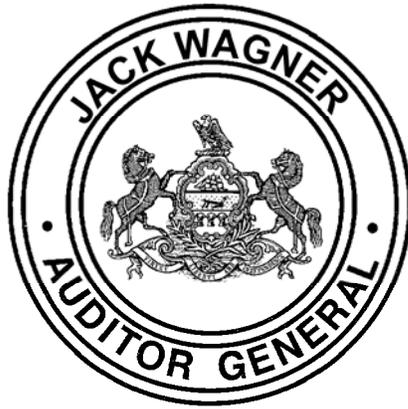
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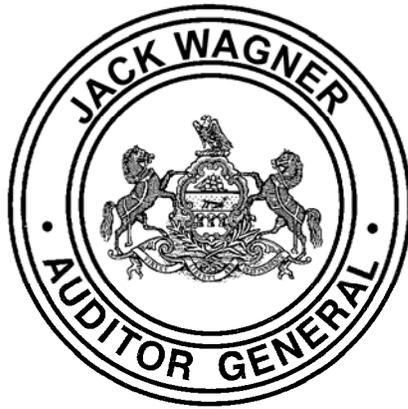
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Report of Independent Auditors on Compliance

The Honorable Edward G. Rendell
Governor
Commonwealth Of Pennsylvania
Harrisburg, Pennsylvania 17120

Dear Governor Rendell:

The Department of Public Welfare, through its County Assistance Offices, determines eligibility for cash assistance, medical assistance, and food stamp benefits according to established policies and procedures. By the authority of Pennsylvania Code, Title 55, Chapter 109, the Department of the Auditor General audits these County Assistance Offices.

This report contains the results of our audit of the Dauphin County Assistance Office, covering the period July 19, 2003 to October 21, 2005. Procedures included determining the County Assistance Office's compliance with Department of Public Welfare regulations, governing laws, and administrative rules regarding the disbursement of benefits and the management of the County Assistance Office. We examined, on a test basis, evidence in support of benefits provided, reviewed documentation of County Assistance Office actions and interviewed County Assistance Office personnel and welfare recipients. We also evaluated the Overpayment Control System.

Our report details findings and recommendations that resulted from our eligibility review and our review of the Overpayment Control System.

It should be noted, that as a result of Internal Revenue Code §6103, the Department of the Auditor General no longer has access to Income Eligibility Verification System Exchanges 4 and 5. Because this poses a scope limitation, exceptions may exist beyond those disclosed during our audit. In addition, overpayment amounts stated in this audit report are limited by the Department of Public Welfare's Automated Restitution Referral and Computation system, which does not calculate overpayments beyond a two-year period.

This report is intended for the benefit of the Dauphin County Assistance Office management, Department of Public Welfare officials, and Office of Inspector General officials. It is not intended to be and should not be used by anyone other than these specified parties.

Sincerely,

JACK WAGNER
Auditor General

November 17, 2005

**Commonwealth of Pennsylvania
Department of Public Welfare
Dauphin County Assistance Office**

BACKGROUND INFORMATION
AND
OBJECTIVES, SCOPE, AND METHODOLOGY

Background Information

Department of Public Welfare

The Department of Public Welfare (DPW) provides money, Food Stamps, Medical Assistance and other services to needy recipients in Pennsylvania. DPW administers these services locally through a County Assistance Office (CAO), or in larger counties, through a District Office (DO). We conduct audits in all 67 counties throughout Pennsylvania.

DPW, through its Office of Income Maintenance, is responsible for analyzing, interpreting, developing and maintaining the regulatory policy for all federal and state funded public assistance benefit programs. DPW also provides policy clarifications to guide the application of its regulations.

DPW created the Cash Assistance Handbook (CAH), the Food Stamp Handbook (FSH), and the Medicaid Eligibility Handbook (MEH) to provide guidance to income maintenance caseworkers at the CAOs and DOs. The handbooks give the caseworker direction on how to use financial and non-financial information to determine an individual's eligibility for cash assistance, food stamp, and medical assistance benefits. The CAH provides guidance on Temporary Assistance to Needy Families (TANF) and General Assistance (GA). TANF is a federally-funded program which provides money for dependent children who are needy because financial support is not available from their parents. The payment is made to parents or relatives who care for the children in family homes. GA is a state-funded program which provides money primarily to single individuals and childless couples who do not have enough income to meet their basic needs. The FSH provides guidance for administering the Food Stamp Program which is operated jointly by the U.S. Department of Agriculture, Food and Nutrition Service, and DPW. The MEH provides guidance for administering the Medical Assistance Program to clients who are eligible for cash assistance, Nonmoney Payment, or Medically Needy Only benefits. DPW makes either direct payment to medical practitioners and vendors for services, medications, and medical supplies, or a capitation payment to contracted managed care organizations.

Objectives, Scope, and Methodology

The Department of the Auditor General (Department), Bureau of Public Assistance Audits conducts audits of CAOs to determine compliance with DPW regulations that pertain to recipient eligibility and the disbursement of cash and food stamps. Additionally, the Bureau reviews the CAO's management policies and their implementation as they relate to the areas we audited. Audit reports providing factual, relevant and useful information are then sent by the Auditor General to the Governor, DPW, the Office of Inspector General (OIG) and certain state legislators.

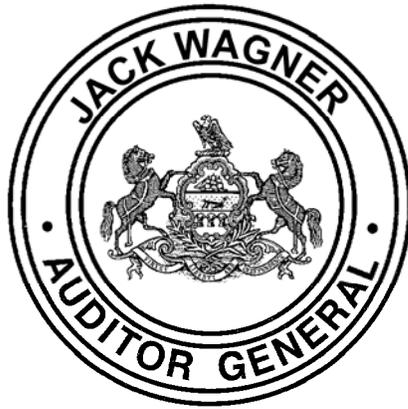
The audit included eligibility reviews of a sample of public assistance cases for the audit period July 19, 2003 to October 21, 2005. We also reviewed the CAO's implementation of procedures for the Overpayment Control System to determine compliance with regulations and policies.

Results from the eligibility reviews of the sample of public assistance cases as well as the procedural reviews apply only to CAO files, records, and systems. However, because DPW establishes the CAO policies and procedures as well as maintains their computer information system, the deficiencies and/or exceptions identified during our audit may need to be corrected by DPW. Therefore, our recommendations are directed to DPW as well as the CAO.

As previously noted, due to Internal Revenue Code §6103, the Department no longer has access to recipient resource information contained on the Income Eligibility Verification System (IEVS) Exchanges 4 and 5. (Exchange 4 contains information from the Social Security Administration (SSA) earnings reference file and Exchange 5 contains information from the Internal Revenue Service unearned income file.) This poses a scope limitation, as the Department cannot ascertain whether the CAO is reviewing information from these two resources as required by Section 1137 of the Social Security Act. Furthermore, without access the Department is unable to verify that the CAO is using all recipient resource information in determining recipient eligibility and calculating benefit amounts.

Reviews of the public assistance cases and the Overpayment Control System detected instances of noncompliance; therefore, we submitted findings in these areas.

During the June 22, 2006 exit conference, the Department's staff reviewed these findings and recommendations with the Dauphin CAO representatives. We have included CAO personnel comments, where applicable, in this report.



**Commonwealth of Pennsylvania
Department of Public Welfare
Dauphin County Assistance Office**

FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Findings and Recommendations

I. Random Eligibility Audit Results

During the course of our audit, we examined 148 out of 2,502 case records from the Dauphin CAO to determine if personnel properly maintained case records in accordance with DPW's policies and procedures, and properly disbursed authorized benefits to eligible recipients in accordance with the rules and regulations established by DPW. We also notified CAO personnel when we discovered ineligible persons receiving assistance.

Title 55 of the Pennsylvania Code provides criteria for determining public assistance eligibility. Chapter 109 of Title 55 provides for the Department to audit the decisions of the CAOs against the rules and regulations established by DPW.

Our audit included an examination of the case record material as it relates to the proper interpretation and application of the rules and regulations of DPW pertaining to the recipient's eligibility for public assistance. The criteria for our review included, but was not limited to, DPW's:

- Cash Assistance Handbook (CAH);
- Food Stamp Handbook (FSH);
- Supplemental Handbook (SH);
- Income Eligibility Verification System (IEVS) Manual;
- Automated Restitution Referral and Computation (ARRC) Manual;
- Client Information System (CIS) Manual; and
- Operations Memorandum (OPS) & Policy Clarifications.

Our audit disclosed 62 exceptions in 55 of the 148 cases examined. The most significant exceptions are discussed in the following findings:

- CAO personnel failed to follow applicable DPW procedures (refer to Finding No. 1);
- CAO personnel incorrectly determined recipient benefits (refer to Finding No. 2); and
- CAO personnel failed to obtain and/or document information required in establishing recipient eligibility (refer to Finding No. 3).

Findings and Recommendations

Finding 1 - CAO personnel failed to follow applicable DPW procedures

- **Road to Economic Self-sufficiency through Employment and Training (RESET) Program.**

Employment and training services are provided through the RESET program, which is designed to enable welfare recipients to secure jobs that lead to economic independence and self-sufficiency. A mandatory RESET participant is required to spend a certain amount of time participating in employment and training activities. The Agreement of Mutual Responsibility (AMR), which is jointly developed by the recipient and the caseworker, is the tool that is used to direct the client's efforts toward achieving self-sufficiency by identifying reasonable, achievable goals and determining what activities the client will complete to achieve those goals.

Current federal TANF regulations require each state to meet a work participation rate for all families receiving assistance. A state's TANF block grant can be reduced if work participation rate requirements are not met.

The CAH and the FSH contain the requirements for enrolling recipients in RESET.

During our audit, we found three exceptions in three cases where recipients were enrolled in work related activities but did not continue participation in the activity.

These exceptions occurred because the staff in the Employment and Training Units may not have properly communicated information related to clients' participation in employment and training.

The CAO's failure to ensure recipients' participation in employment and training activities could result in clients not moving toward economic independence and self sufficiency. In addition, failure to ensure recipients' participation compromised DPW's ability to meet federal TANF requirements. The recipients in these cases were paid \$2,572 in benefits for which they did not meet all eligibility requirements.

Recommendations

The CAO should review the process by which personnel track recipients who are enrolled in employment and training programs and improve communication between ETP units and caseworkers.

Findings and Recommendations

CAO Management Response

In a June 30, 2006 memorandum to Department personnel, the Dauphin CAO Executive Director provided the following response:

“Because Dauphin CAO is in Harrisburg, the capital, we feel the pressure of working quickly and communicating effectively with all of our many stakeholders. Due to the need to meet the standards/timeframes set for the programs we administer and the complexities associated with TANF cases we added more caseworkers to the unit. We have sent both RESET caseworkers and a Supervisor back through the Income Maintenance Standard Training Program (IMSTP). Combining the TANF/RESET units has allowed for a one-stop shop approach. Centralizing the TANF/RESET files and programs has helped with tracking and control of program participation.

Since Oct. 2005 TANF/RESET staff has received specialized training in ETP, MPP and Drug and Alcohol. Revamping the MPP program has been a plus. There is now a written process and an MPP worker with social work experience facilitating the identification of clients with multiple barriers.

Client participation with a local long-time vendor declined. Through communication with the Local Management Committee (LMC), a new vendor was selected. As Executive Director of one of the busiest counties in the area, I have accepted the position of Chairperson for the Local Management Committee (LMC). We anticipate greater client participation and improved communication for Dauphin and other surrounding counties.”

- **Income Eligibility Verification System (IEVS)**

IEVS is an automated system developed to provide for the exchange of information between the Pennsylvania Department of Labor and Industry, Office of Employment Security, the SSA and the Internal Revenue Service. IEVS provides information to the caseworker to aid in the determination of eligibility and the amount of the benefit the recipient should receive.

Findings and Recommendations

During our audit, we found two exceptions where CAO personnel failed to correctly and timely dispose of information on IEVS. IEVS provided wage information from employers that was not properly reconciled with income used to compute benefits. These exceptions resulted in \$920 in subsequent overpayments.

Chapter 1 of the IEVS Manual provides guidelines to follow when using IEVS.

Recommendations

The CAO should instruct personnel to review IEVS exchanges for reported and unreported income. Personnel should review and properly reconcile unreported income so overpayments are correctly identified and initiated through the IEVS system. Supervisory personnel should review IEVS reports to ensure timely and accurate disposition codes are used.

CAO Management Response

In a June 30, 2006 memorandum to Department personnel, the Dauphin CAO Executive Director provided the following response:

“At the December 7, 2005, Supervisory retreat staff proposed a Team Processing Unit (TPU), which was established April 17, 2006 and includes an IEVS clearance function. One worker handles all IEVS for a group of combined caseloads, allowing more focused attention on proper and timely completion of IEVS. We will evaluate this approach and expand as appropriate. We currently hold quarterly IEVS workshops with trainees and other staff with identified weaknesses. Expansion of these workshops is planned as to include all IMCW staff. We continue to have all ongoing staff set aside one day per week (Thursdays) specifically for the completion of IEVS.”

- **Support Pass-Through (SPT) adjustment**

SPT adjustments are increases in recipients' cash benefits which occur when the Domestic Relations Office forwards child support money for recipients to DPW for the recipient. Because food stamp benefits are based on a recipient's income, this increase in cash benefits may result in a decrease in the recipient's food stamps.

Findings and Recommendations

Exceptions occurred because the automated system failed to timely adjust the SPT to the recipient's food stamp benefits at application/reapplication, even though the information was directly available to the CAO. Sixteen exceptions occurred resulting in \$709 in over-issuances.

The FSH establishes provisions for adjusting the SPT to the food stamp benefits.

Recommendations

SPT income should be reviewed at all applications and reapplications. Because the SPT is automatically posted on CIS, the Department of Public Welfare should consider updating its system software so that the SPT is adjusted to the food stamp benefits timely.

CAO Management Response

In a June 30, 2006 memorandum to Department personnel, the Dauphin CAO Executive Director provided the following response:

“We believe these are system errors. Per Q2781 and Policy Clarification-PFS12303550 adjustments for support pass-throughs should be processed automatically. For many of the errors noted, correct unearned screens existed but were not adjusted correctly by the system.”

Finding 2 - CAO personnel incorrectly determined recipient benefits

Our audit disclosed that CAO personnel did not verify all expenses when determining benefits, resulting in an over-issuance of \$2,584.

The CAH and the FSH contain policies and procedures to follow to correctly determine recipient benefits.

This exception was caused by CAO personnel's failure to verify shelter and utility expenses to determine the appropriate monthly food stamp allotment.

Findings and Recommendations

Recommendations

The CAO should instruct personnel to review DPW policies and procedures for determining food stamp benefits by verifying shelter and utility expenses when determining the monthly food stamp allotment.

CAO Management Response

In a June 30, 2006 memorandum to Department personnel, the Dauphin CAO Executive Director provided the following response:

“The problems we face are compounded by the constant turnover of staff. 68% of our staff has less than 2 years experience. The population we serve is growing, is more transient and has a more pressing need for services. To increase staff knowledge, reduce errors and increase payment accuracy we have done the following: Semi-Annual Reporting (SAR) training including how handle shelter/utility expenses was held with all staff in February 2006. We established a Renewal Unit in June 2005 to handle all Medical /FS and FS only renewals. For newer and struggling workers, Supervisors are doing 100% review of their cases at application and reapplication.”

Finding 3 - CAO personnel failed to obtain and/or document information required in establishing recipient eligibility

During our audit, the verification for establishing recipient eligibility was absent from examined case records which resulted in 36 exceptions. Case records and ARRC information lacked detailed documentation of client and CAO actions. Reimbursement forms required for Supplemental Security Income applicants were missing from records. Also the ARRC system was not updated to adequately indicate the status of potential overpayments. Finally, the social security numbers of Legally Responsible Relatives (LRRs) were known to the CAO, but not entered into the IEVS.

The CAH, FSH, and IEVS Manual, Chapter 1, establish the procedures to be followed when obtaining and documenting recipient eligibility.

These exceptions occurred because caseworkers failed to review and retain reimbursement forms required for eligibility. Caseworkers failed to update the ARRC

Findings and Recommendations

system when wage verification was obtained regarding potential overpayments and failed to document the information in the case record. Not maintaining current documentation in case records contributed to poor case management.

Recommendations

CAO supervisors should stress to caseworkers the importance of following established DPW policies and procedures for maintaining case records and updating the ARRC system as designated in the above cited handbooks. CAO personnel should also enter LRR social security numbers on the IEVS system when known.

CAO Management Response

In a June 30, 2006 memorandum to Department personnel, the Dauphin CAO Executive Director provided the following response:

“Intake has designed a new prescreen checklist and application packets for use with General Assistance applications. Forms required for reimbursement are part of this packet. Our General Assistance Worker is reviewing each assigned record to ensure that proper completed reimbursement forms are in the record. At both a Supervisors’ meeting and a staff meeting in September 2005 the importance of entering correct social security numbers in IEVS for LRRs was discussed. Supervisors were reminded to include this area in their case reviews. We currently hold quarterly ARRC workshops with trainees and other staff with identified weaknesses with ARRC. We are expanding this training to include all IMCW staff. Part of the TPU team includes an ARRC component with one worker completing all ARRC actions for a combined caseload; allows the worker to focus on ARRC with less interruption.”

Status of Prior Audit Finding

Overpayments and Other Exceptions Totaling \$13,268 Occurred as Result of Recipients Withholding Information and Case Record Maintenance Exceptions

Our current audit covering the period July 19, 2003 to October 21, 2005 disclosed that inadequate/incorrect recipient information and case record management exceptions continue to occur at the Dauphin County CAO; therefore a repeat finding is warranted. Refer to Findings 1, 2 and 3 located on pages 9 through 13 for additional discussion on these issues.

Findings and Recommendations

II. Overpayment Control System

Finding 4 - Untimely Verification and Referral of Overpayments and Over-Issuances Totaling \$1,229 Occurred as a Result of Procedural Deficiencies in the Overpayment Control System

We reviewed the Dauphin CAO Overpayment Control System to determine if CAO personnel properly investigated suspected overpayments, controlled and documented investigations, and referred verified overpayments timely. From 4,866 entries listed as pending, completed, or overpayment on the ARRC Daily Caseload Detail Report dated August 2, 2005 we selected 52 cases.

Our review disclosed the following exceptions:

- **In 8 cases, CAO personnel failed to complete the referral data preventing timely notification to OIG.**

The SH, Section 910.51 provides that the CAO will refer all overpayments to the OIG within 60 days from the date the CAO verifies the overpayment occurred.

The section further provides that in order to recover through recoupment, the OIG must notify the client of the cash overpayment claim within six months of the date the CAO first identified the overpayment, or within one year of the date the CAO first identifies the overpayment, as long as the delay in obtaining verification was caused by an outside source.

These exceptions occurred because the CAO staff did not have controls in place to refer overpayments within the required timeframes. Failure to complete the Overpayment Referral Data Input form and forward it to the OIG within the required 60 days delayed and jeopardized the recovery of \$292 in overpayments and \$392 in over-issuances.

Recommendations

The CAO should instruct personnel to ensure that all verified wage information is applied so that overpayments and over-issuances can be completed within the required 60 days. The CAO should review internal control procedures with their clerical workers along with their caseworkers for tracking the overpayment process, completing verified

Findings and Recommendations

overpayments, and review the overpayment process to make sure that the computed overpayment and over-issuances are correct.

CAO Management Response

In a June 30, 2006 memorandum to Department personnel, the Dauphin CAO Executive Director provided the following response:

“With a constant flow of walk-in applicants, demand for services and public scrutiny this is an area that can (even with the best intentions) get sidetracked. We recognize the need to ensure more timely completion of ARRC. We are in the process of establishing the following as a remedy: The Executive Director will be holding monthly individual conferences with each Manager to review all programs and status of all pending work. Managers and Supervisors are expected to do likewise. All Supervisors will be responsible for pulling reports and developing work plans to bring outstanding work including ARRC into compliance. Closer monitoring will be used to prevent overdue work in the future. More training on ARRC will be provided to all staff and additional workshops will be established throughout the next year. We continue to have all ongoing staff set aside one day per week (Thursday) for ARRC completion.”

- **In 43 cases, CAO personnel failed to contact non-responding employers.**

These exceptions occurred when caseworkers failed to contact employers when employers failed to respond to initial requests for wage verification within 45 days of the initial request. Caseworkers failed to timely contact employers within ten days to verify employer addresses.

Failure to contact employers timely may have delayed procedures to recover incorrectly disbursed benefits. Also, failure to contact employers hindered procedures to send a second PA-78 request and resulted in \$266 in overpayments and \$279 in over-issuances.

These exceptions occurred because caseworkers failed to adhere to the overpayment investigation required timeframes. Additionally, CAO supervisors failed to review the “Non-Responding Employer” list. Clerical personnel did not contact non-responding employers due to a lack of procedural controls. Chapter 910 of the

Findings and Recommendations

Supplemental Handbook and the ARRC manual provide procedures and guidelines for contacting non-responding employers.

Recommendations

The CAO should instruct personnel to contact employers within 10 work days after reviewing the “Non-responding Employer” list. Caseworkers should also verify employer addresses.

CAO Management Response

In a June 30, 2006 memorandum to Department personnel, the Dauphin CAO Executive Director provided the following response:

“OPS Memo 98-10-03 and Daily Status – D727 were reviewed with staff in September 2005 and a new procedure was put in place. While we were making contact with employers to verify their correct address, we were not documenting the contact. Now one staff member is monitoring Non-Responding employers. If the employer participates with the Work Number a request for wages is completed through the website. If the employer does not participate with the Work Number, the worker attempts to contact the employer by phone to verify the correct address and to determine why the initial PA 78 was not completed. If appropriate a second PA 78 is sent. This same staff member also ensure that the ARRC system is updated when verification is received from the employer. All contacts and actions are narrated using a template suggested by the OPS Memo and Daily Status.”

Status of Prior Audit Finding

Untimely Referral of an Over-Issuance Totaling \$392 Occurred as a Result of Procedural Deficiencies in the Overpayment Control System

Our current audit covering the period July 19, 2003 to October 21, 2005 disclosed that procedural deficiencies continue to exist at the Dauphin CAO in the execution of the Overpayment Control System; therefore, a finding is warranted. Refer to the bullets in Finding 4 on pages 15 and 16 for additional discussion on these issues.



**Commonwealth of Pennsylvania
Department of Public Welfare
Dauphin County Assistance Office**

**AUDIT SUMMARIES
GLOSSARY
AND
APPENDIX**

Audit Summaries

Random Eligibility Audit Results

	Cases at CAO	Cases Reviewed	Cases with Errors
<u>Current</u>	2,052	148	55
<u>Prior</u>	2,068	317	65

Other Results

<u>PROGRAM</u>	<u>No. of Cases</u>	<u>Monetary Effect</u>
Overpayment Control System:		
CAO personnel failed complete the referral form timely.	8	\$ 684
CAO personnel failed to contact non-responding employer timely.	43	545
TOTALS:	<u>51</u>	<u>\$1,229</u>

Glossary

Administrative Underpayment:

Cash and/or food stamp benefits to which recipients were entitled but did not receive because of County Assistance Office error.

Case Closure:

Equal to one month of cash and/or food stamp benefits that were not paid/issued to recipients as a result of the Department's audit establishing recipient ineligibility.

Client Information System (CIS):

The on-line data base which contains the information necessary to authorize cash, Medicaid, and food stamps.

Closed Case:

A case that is no longer being issued welfare benefits.

Countable Income:

Income that is not exempt or excluded from benefit determination.

Legally Responsible Relative (LRR):

A spouse or the biological or adoptive parent of a TANF dependent child, a TANF minor parent, or a GA unemancipated minor child under age 19 or a GA minor parent. This term does not include putative fathers.

Reimbursement:

Money owed by recipients for cash benefits they received while waiting for a lump sum payment from sources such as a lawsuit, insurance, Supplemental Security Income, etc.

Supplemental Security Income (SSI):

A federal program funded by general tax revenues and administered by the Social Security Administration. Provides cash to aged, blind, and disabled persons who have little or no income to meet basic needs for food, clothing, and shelter. Received in lieu of cash grants from Public Welfare; however, SSI recipients can qualify for food stamps and medicare. Both children and adults can qualify for SSI.

Support Pass-Through (SPT):

An increase in the recipient's cash benefits which occurs when the Domestic Relations Office forwards child support money for recipients to the Department of Public Welfare. Because food stamp benefits are based on a recipient's income, this increase in cash benefits may result in a concurrent, but not equal, decrease in the recipient's food stamps.

Appendix

Abbreviations Used in Report

AMR	Agreement of Mutual Responsibility
ARRC	Automated Restitution Referral and Comprehensive System
CAH	Cash Assistance Handbook
CAO	County Assistance Office
CIS	Client Information System
DO	District Office
DPW	Department of Public Welfare
ETP	Employment and training Program
FS	Food Stamps
FSH	Food Stamp Handbook
GA	General Assistance
IEVS	Income Eligibility Verification System
IMCW	Income Maintenance Caseworker
IMSTP	Income Maintenance Standard Training Program
IRS	Internal Revenue Service
LMC	Local Management Committee
LRR	Legally Responsible Relative
MPP	Maximizing Participation Project
MEH	Medical Eligibility Handbook
MNO	Medically Needy Only
OIG	Office of Inspector General
OPS	Operations Memorandum
PAEM	Public assistance Eligibility Manual
RESET	Road to Economic Self-Sufficiency through Employment and Training
SAR	Semi-Annual Reporting
SH	Supplemental Handbook
SPT	Support Pass-Through
SSA	Social Security Administration
SSI	Supplemental Security Income
TANF	Temporary Assistance for Needy Families
TPU	Team Processing Unit

Audit Report Distribution List

This report was originally distributed to the following:

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The Honorable Edward G. Rendell
Governor

The Honorable Donald L. Patterson
Inspector General
Office of Inspector General

The Honorable Jake Corman
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Public Health and Welfare Committee
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