

OFFICE OF INSPECTOR GENERAL  
**CITY OF NEW ORLEANS**



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**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE:**  
July 29, 2015

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**TRAFFIC COURT BUDGETARY OVERSIGHT SHOULD BE RETURNED TO NEW ORLEANS CITY COUNCIL**

The New Orleans Office of Inspector General (OIG) today issued a [report](#) called "Funding of Traffic Court." The evaluation recommends returning budgetary oversight of the Court to the New Orleans City Council and funding Court core operations from the City general fund instead of relying on the Court's Judicial Expense Fund.

The report found state law requiring the City Council to fund Traffic Court while also granting the Court the ability to raise its own funds undermines the Council's authority to provide oversight to ensure responsible use of public funds. The OIG recommends the City and Court seek amendments to state statutes to allow Council oversight of the Court's budget.

The report also found the Court's reliance on its Judicial Expense Fund created a structural conflict of interest because judges have an incentive to find defendants guilty in order to fund operations of the Court. From 2008 through 2012 judges raised 67 percent to 83 percent of their operating expenses through court fees assessed on guilty defendants. The OIG recommended that core funding of Court operations come from the City's general fund with reduced reliance on the Court's Judicial Expense Fund. The OIG recommended the City and Court ask the legislature to amend state law to lower the amount the Court is authorized to collect to an amount that will not cause a structural conflict of interest.

Evaluators found Traffic Court did not collect data needed to measure performance to document its efficiency, demonstrate accountability, or weigh if the Court is appropriately funded or staffed.

"We think City Council budgetary oversight will cause Traffic Court to be more efficient," stated Inspector General Ed Quatrevaux. "The Court will have to submit budget requests that are based on rational defensible needs, and in order to do that, they're going to have to measure their performance."

The report also found the Court used deficit spending to fund payroll expenses instead of

withholding City fine monies as required by state law. Evaluators discovered the City overrode budgetary controls to use Traffic Court funds to pay for expenses in the Coroner's Office without an ordinance to reallocate funds.

Evaluators studied funding from 2008 through 2012. Traffic Court collected between \$9.1 million and \$12.9 million each year during that period, with the cost of the court running an annual average of \$6 million.

"Funding of Traffic Court" is part of a series of OIG reports examining funding of the city's criminal justice system agencies.

In addition, a [video](#) of remarks by Inspector General Quatrevaux and Elizabeth Pape, Inspector & Evaluator, and a [brief](#) summarizing the report are available.

Reports issued by the Office of Inspector General are available on the website [nola.oig.org](http://nola.oig.org).

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