

November 1, 2023

Executive Summary for Orleans Parish Sheriff's Office Mardi Gras Hotel Rooms Investigation 23-0005-I

The Office of Inspector General (OIG) for the City of New Orleans (City) concluded the investigation into the allegation that the Orleans Parish Sheriff's Office (OPSO) improperly obtained hotel rooms for command staff during Mardi Gras 2023.

Basis for Investigation:

- This investigation was predicated upon an anonymous complaint provided to the Office of Inspector General (OIG) alleging that the Orleans Parish Sheriff's Office (OPSO) improperly secured and paid for hotel rooms at the Omni Royal Orleans Hotel, located at 621 St. Louis St., New Orleans, LA 70130, in the French Quarter to house OPSO Command Staff during Mardi Gras 2023. The complaint also alleged rooms were left vacant by other staff members.

The Investigative Findings:

- Based upon the review of records obtained from the Omni, a total of 90 room nights were secured and paid for by the OPSO. In the OIG analysis of the Omni records and interviews conducted of OPSO employees, 37 hotel nights were occupied by the OPSO Command Staff. Four employees stayed six nights or more, three employees did not occupy a room at all, and six employees stayed three nights or less in a room secured and paid for by the OPSO.

Employee		Room Rate	Nights Rented	Nights Used	Total Room Charges	Charge for Unused Rooms
Corey	Amacker	\$160.00	8	6	\$1,280.00	\$320.00
Dana	Busby	\$271.00	6	1	\$1,626.00	\$1,355.00
Briankisha	Crusto	\$160.00	8	1	\$1,280.00	\$1,120.00
Earl	Fox	\$160.00	8	0	\$1,280.00	\$1,280.00
Anthony	Fricano	\$271.00	6	2	\$1,626.00	\$1,084.00
Kristen	Morales	\$160.00	8	8	\$1,280.00	\$0.00
Ernest	Newman	\$271.00	4	1	\$1,084.00	\$813.00
Silas	Phipps	\$160.00	8	6	\$1,280.00	\$320.00
Tanya	Picard	\$271.00	6	3	\$1,626.00	\$813.00
John	Scott	\$160.00	8	0	\$1,280.00	\$1,280.00
Kevin	Talley	\$271.00	6	0	\$1,626.00	\$1,626.00
Laura	Veazey	\$160.00	8	8	\$1,280.00	\$0.00
Lance	Wade	\$271.00	6	1	\$1,626.00	\$1,355.00
Totals			90	37	\$18,174.00	\$11,046.00

- As was initially described by Sheriff Hutson and the OPSO to local media, LAK9, a dog training business located in Vermilion Parish, had initially offered to pay the costs of the hotel rooms via a donation. OIG Investigators were told by the owner of LAK9, Paul Leblanc, that the donation idea was originally suggested by Edward Sieja, an individual not associated with LAK9. Leblanc later declined to make the donation to OPSO for the cost of the hotel rooms at the Omni. Leblanc stated the donation could affect future business with the OPSO.
- Recently disclosed information in media reports by the OPSO related to the cost of the Mardi Gras hotel rooms, claimed the rooms were paid out of a “special projects account” which uses money from sources like “vending machines and fundraisers.” As noted in the OIG interview of Elizabeth Boyer, Comptroller, OPSO, the special projects account is funds from donations and income for the Law Enforcement District of Orleans Parish. However, as noted in Louisiana Revised Statutes 13:5901, the purpose of the district is to provide financing to the Sheriff. La. R.S. 13:5908 requires that all funds collected by the District be paid into the Sheriff’s general fund and disbursed in accordance with law and subject to the State public bid laws.
- It is apparent the wasteful expense associated with the Mardi Gras hotels rooms; which from the news report and the Boyer interview may be reimbursed to the General Fund of the OPSO by the Special Projects Account still constitutes a wasteful use of public funds. The Law Enforcement District of Orleans Parish is a political subdivision of the State of Louisiana and by creation is a public entity.

The OIG Recommendations:

- The funds expended by the OPSO for hotel rooms obtained during Mardi Gras 2023 for the command staff was wasteful and unnecessary. David Trautenberg, the former Chief Financial Officer, OPSO, believed the expense to be unnecessary, a bad look to the taxpayers and expressed his concerns. In accordance, the OIG recommends future expenditure of taxpayer or public funds be scrutinized in order to ensure the funds are appropriate and relate to the successful completion of any OPSO mission. The wasteful expenditure of any funds, taxpayer or public, must be prevented to ensure the government is a steward of those funds.
- It is the position of this office that there would be substantial benefits for the City and its taxpayers if the OPSO adopts the Budget, Requisition, and Accounting Services System (BRASS) replacing the OPSO’s Enterprise Resource Planning (ERP) system which is an outdated purchasing system. Although the CEA between the City and OPSO was stored by the City in BRASS, OPSO has no comparable system. OPSO’s adoption of BRASS as its purchasing system in place of ERP would greatly improve transparency. This would also address concerns raised by various city councilmembers during previous budget hearings. BRASS has the ability to allow read-only access to important stakeholders. This will

reassure the City, who appropriates more than 70% of OPSO's budget, that those City funds will be spent effectively and efficiently.

Inspector General Ed Michel provides the following statement regarding this investigation:

"In these times of increasing threats and limited resources, it is incumbent upon the OPSO and all recipients of City monies to utilize those funds in a manner that is efficient and effective, void of wasteful spending. Our investigation did not focus on the necessity of incurring hotel lodging expenses during Mardi Gras, but rather the concerns raised regarding rooms going unoccupied."

If you wish to speak to me, I can be contacted at (504) 681-3263 or via email at emichel@nolaog.gov.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Edward Michel". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large initial "E".

Edward Michel, CIG
Inspector General
City of New Orleans