

Call The Fraud & Mismanagement Hotline when Bad Things Happen in State Government

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The Fraud and Mismanagement Hotline, operated by the Legislative Audit Bureau, was created so that people could **“easily and confidentially report suspected fraud, waste and mismanagement, and other improper activities within state government.”**

MADISON - “Workers and inmates were required to remove asbestos with no protection,” the woman told me. Her colleague agreed. “Since we lost union protections, bad things are happening at the Department of Corrections.”

The workers said no cameras or cell phones are allowed in the prison, making the bad things hard to prove. State workers didn't know what to do.

I suggested they call the Fraud, Waste, and Mismanagement Hotline at 1-877-373-8317. The Legislative Audit Bureau (LAB) oversees the hotline. The LAB is part of the legislative branch of state government, which puts it in the perfect position to oversee the functions of the executive branch of state government.

The hotline was established by 2007 Wisconsin Act 126 and has been active since April 2008.

According to the 2012 LAB report on the hotline, it was created “so that the public, state employees and contractors could easily and confidentially report suspected fraud, waste and mismanagement, and other improper activities within state government.”

It provides one of those critical checks and balances in government and is managed by a Certified Fraud Examiner.

Complaints to the hotline come primarily through the toll-free number (1-877-FRAUD-17). A secure voice mail is always available at this number. People can also use the U.S. mail or a secure web-based form found at <http://legis.wisconsin.gov/LAB/Hotline/>.

Those contacting the hotline are not required to leave their name or other contact information. But auditors tell me people are encouraged to leave some contact information as LAB staff must often make follow-up inquiries to get to the bottom of a problem.

Those who contact the hotline are protected by some of the strongest whistle blower protections in state statute. State law requires the Audit Bureau to keep the identity of a person contacting the hotline private even when other information about the fraud or mismanagement investigation is made public.

Sometimes the information conveyed through the hotline ends up in a full-scale Audit Bureau investigation. Some of the most public and wide-reaching state investigations began with a call to the hotline. For example, an audit of Food Share benefits spent outside the state of Wisconsin was the result of a hotline call. Another investigation uncovered problems with the monitoring of administrative contracts, unauthorized spending and failure to competitively bid contracts for administering the state's large Medicaid program.

Other audits having their genesis in hotline contacts include an investigation of the asphalt warranty program that looked at the construction and life of state roads, and yet another looked into the misuse of Workforce Advancement Training funds.

Many people called the hotline with problems related to Family Care, the program assisting the developmentally disabled, frail elderly and physically handicapped. Using the information shared by callers, auditors were able to craft a much more thorough evaluation of the Family Care program.

Most recently, full scale audits were authorized by the Joint Committee on Audit on two problems in state government brought to legislators' attention through calls. The first is an investigation into problems experienced by people filing claims for unemployment insurance. The second is alleged fraud and mismanagement by the company contracted with the state to provide nonemergency medical transportation for Medicaid patients who need help getting to a doctor or therapy appointment.

In both cases complaint calls came in to legislators' offices - including mine - and the LAB hotline.

Complaints matter. The hotline provides a convenient and confidential way for people to provide information about fraud, waste and mismanagement directly to someone who can investigate the problem.

I know when it comes to state government, shining a light on something makes it improve. Auditors tell me this is known as the Sentinel Effect: the tendency for human behavior to improve when people know their performance is being evaluated.

Government is about us. When you know things are not working, take the time to call the hotline. Your information could become the critical piece of the puzzle needed to solve a problem of waste, fraud, or agency mismanagement.

Remember, call 1-877-FRAUD-17.

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