



Inspector General Insights

Background: The Collier County Clerk of the Circuit Court & Comptroller's Office of Inspector General (OIG) questioned \$1,828,753 in ineligible and potentially fraudulent CARES Act funds and COVID assistance payments in 2020 and 2021. A total of 2,220 grant applications were reviewed, resulting in a fraud case for approximately \$200,000 referred to law enforcement. The OIG identified ineligible payments for reasons such as duplicate submissions, duplicate dependents claimed, unsatisfied liens, conflicting compensation under another federal program, and homestead exemptions on rental properties. The current Emergency Rental Assistance Program (ERAP) has raised similar concerns.

Objective: To provide residents with an update on the COVID assistance grants as administered by the reviewed by the Collier County Government's Community and Human Services Division (CHS), and as audited by the Clerk's Finance team prior to payment.

Observations: On July 11, 2022, IG Senior Investigator Ruben Ramos attended the monthly Collier County Affordable Housing Advisory Committee meeting, and he discussed 59 potentially fraudulent ERAP applications currently under OIG review. Ramos discovered that the identities of three Collier County residents and one Miami-Dade County resident were stolen and utilized on two Collier ERAP grant applications. The OIG confirmed what appeared to be fraudulent documentation in 56 other applications, and the OIG could clear payment on only one application that was initially flagged with potentially fraudulent information.

In Case 2022.014, an unknown suspect obtained the identity of an out-of-state doctor who owns a home in Naples. The suspect submitted a false application and false lease, with a request for rental assistance. Subsequently, in Case 2022.018, the OIG conducted a preliminary review of a second application, which utilized some of the same photos and backup used in Case 2022.014. However, this application was submitted under a different name. The suspect in Case 2022.018 requested that the checks be sent to the same address as in Case 2022.014, a Pak Mail facility in Naples. The OIG subsequently determined that an investigation of these suspects had already been initiated by the Sarasota County Sheriff's office; we referred our findings to their office to combine with their case.

Recommendations & Actions: In conjunction with the Sarasota and Collier County sheriff's offices, two individuals were subsequently arrested.

The OIG is actively working with governmental auditing executives statewide and exploring more preventative controls to combat the various fraud schemes detected.

Conclusion: The Clerk & Comptroller's office thanks Collier County Government's Community and Human Services Division management and staff for their partnership in identifying and addressing these potentially fraudulent applications.

Total # Transactions	Amounts Audited or Reviewed	Questioned Costs	Taxpayer Savings	# Findings / Recommendations
59	\$ 1,016,436.66	\$ 1,016,436.66	\$ 1,013,236.66	58