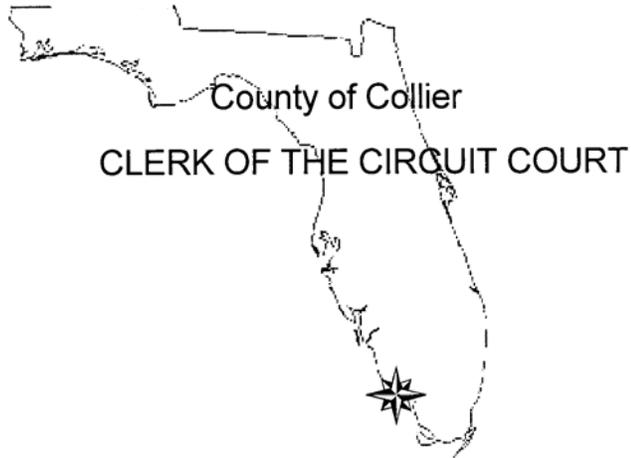


**Collier County Clerk of the Circuit Court
Internal Audit Department**

Audit Report 2005 - 2



Article V – Traffic



Collier County Clerk of the Circuit Court
Internal Audit Department

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Memo

To: The Honorable Dwight E. Brock, Clerk
Through: Crystal Kinzel, Finance Director *CKK*
From: Anthony Fernandez, Internal Audit Manager *ACF*
Date: October 12, 2005
Re: Article V - Traffic Audit

Please find attached our audit report on Article V – Traffic. John Ferrell, Internal Auditor II, led development of this report. Please note that we discussed the audit results and recommendations with the Courts Director and Assistant Director of Criminal Courts, who generally agreed with our observations and recommendations. The Traffic Division's written comments are included, as applicable, after each finding.

Internal Audit gratefully acknowledges the cooperation and assistance of the Traffic Division management and staff. If you have any questions about this report, please contact me at 774-8075.

Article V – Traffic

Background Information

Audit Objectives, Scope, and Methodology

The operational audit focused on the Division's process for recording citations and disposition of court related matters. In addition, Internal Audit assessed the Division's compliance with applicable laws and regulations. Specific objectives of this review were to:

- Determine the efficiency and effectiveness of the Division's process for collecting and recording citations within the authority granted to the Division.
- Evaluate written procedures and determine their effectiveness in actual practice.
- Evaluate the Division's performance in achieving compliance with Article V Revisions, controlling laws, administrative rules, Judge's Policies, Florida Rules of Traffic Court, and other guidelines relating to the processing of citations and related documents (motions etc.).
- Assess the adequacy of the Division's controls and recording system for processing installment payments received by defendants under the Re-Instate Driving Easily (R.I.D.E.) program.

To accomplish our objectives we interviewed Traffic Division, Bookkeeping, and Management Information Systems (MIS) personnel, observed processes and procedures, examined transactions and records, and performed various other procedures necessary in the circumstances.

Our audit was performed in accordance with generally accepted government auditing standards and included examinations of various transactions relating to Article V revisions (as well as events and conditions) occurring during the period July 2004 through March 2005.

Management Summary

Traffic Division employees are dedicated individuals who pride themselves in providing quality customer service frequently under unpleasant circumstances, such as responding to frustrated customers. The audit identified several areas where improvements can be made to improve efficiency; although reportable, these areas are considered relatively minor in relation to the overall effectiveness of managing thousands of non-criminal traffic citations. Except as noted in this report, the Traffic Division substantially complies with the following:

1. Article V revisions effective July 1, 2004;
2. Florida Rules of Traffic Court and Florida Statutes; and
3. Internal controls adequate to ensure citations and required motions filed are accounted for and processed.

Background

Article V of the Florida Constitution provides for the judicial branch of state government, including its structure and responsibilities, and designates funding responsibilities of the counties, the state, and court users relative to the courts system. In 1998, voters passed Revision 7 to Article V, which shifted some of the cost responsibilities from counties to the state. Revision 7, by law, was set for implementation on July 1, 2004 due to the need to inventory court system expenditures and revenues. In 2004, the legislature approved additional changes to the cost structure of the courts system. Article V Revisions impacted the Traffic Division by providing:

- Administrative fees for partial payments of fees, charges, and costs and changes to the distribution of the collections
- Increases to nonrefundable service charge for reinstatement of suspensions imposed under Section 318.15(2), Florida Statute
- Changes in the disposition of traffic infractions, and
- Time restrictions and notification requirements to the defendant and Department of Highway Safety and Motor Vehicles for specified offenses under Chapter 316, Chapter 320, and Chapter 322.

Given the number of statutory changes in effect and the continuing objective of maximizing resources, the Internal Audit Department is conducting a review of court system departments, including Traffic, to ensure compliance with Article V and other requirements and determine possibilities of increasing efficiency.

In addition to Article V requirements, the Traffic Division must adhere to the Florida Rules of Traffic Court, which govern practice and procedure in any traffic case in county courts and before civil traffic infraction hearing officers. The Clerk of the Court is mandated under certain rules to carry out certain duties for the court and Department of Highway Safety and Motor Vehicles, including preparing reports, accepting certain motions, and retaining case files.

The Traffic Division is responsible for the filing of all (non-criminal) traffic citations that are issued by the Collier County Sheriff's Office, Florida Highway Patrol, Naples Police Department, Marco Island Police Department and Law Enforcement of the Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission. In calendar year 2004, the fifteen Traffic personnel processed 60,838 citations compared to 56,103 in 2003, an 8.4% increase. In addition, the Division is responsible for responding to law enforcement, attorney, and citizens traffic related inquiries. Traffic clerks also serve as recorders in an increasingly busy traffic court system. Defendants' dispositions of traffic citations range from paying civil penalties to hearings in Traffic Court. The violations include non-criminal moving infractions such as exceeding posted speed limits, careless driving, and improper lane changes that fall under Chapters 316, 318, and 320 Florida Statutes and non-moving infractions such as seat belt violations, no proof of insurance, and expired drivers licenses and tags that fall under Chapters 316, 320, and 322, Florida Statutes. All traffic infractions are punishable under Chapter 318.

The system of processing citations is highly complex and currently depends on a computer system that is outdated. Documents are scanned and assigned a case number then indexed (docketed) for control purposes. Each traffic clerk receives a batch of citations each morning and inputs and verifies the information from the citation document into the computer using imaging software. Once all citations are accounted for and indexed, citations falling under the criminal code such as driving while under the influence of alcohol or drugs (DUI), driving while license suspended or revoked, and leaving the scene of an accident are transferred to the Criminal Traffic Division for processing.

Article V – Traffic

Findings

Time-Consuming Problem Letters Not Beneficial

Sometimes a defendant mails an incorrect response to a citation, such as remitting insufficient payment or failing to include necessary documentation. In these situations, a clerk writes a “problem letter” to that defendant. Traffic may send two or more letters to defendants who can’t seem to grasp their obligations. No statute or judicial mandate requires the Division to send clarifying letters. Current Administrative internal policy requires one letter to the defendant clarifying issues and providing simple reminders. The Traffic supervisor must approve repetitive letters to the same defendant. As a benchmark, Traffic Divisions in other counties have indicated at seminars that they do not send “problem letters.” Traffic clerks recall that “problem letters” probably began as a customer service convenience, and became a “we’ve always done it that way” institution.

The issue with “problem letters” is that researching and writing them may consume up to half a day of one clerk’s time, yet they seem to neither improve efficiency in Traffic, nor fulfill any legal obligation. Traffic sends these letters out every day. “Problem” letters benefit defendants only.

RECOMMENDATION:

Problem letters appear to be a superfluous function that provides minimal return on time invested in preparation. In the alternative, Courts management should at least restrict “problem letters” to fewer exceptions, and fewer repeat mailings.

Traffic Division’s Response:

For years a persons driver's license was suspended the day they failed to comply. It is one of the reasons we did problem letters. Some were minor offenses that a person had to pay an extra re-instatement fee for because they made a mistake. A few years ago, the law changed and people are given a grace period by D.H.S.M.V. We send notification through TCATS that the person failed to pay. D.H.S.M.V. then notifies the person that their license will be suspended in 20 days if they do not take care of the problem. That gives the person ample time to find out how to take care of the citation. Because of this, the problem letters are no longer necessary.

Obsolete Software Is Inefficient

Test work and observations of sampled citations and related actions such as Orders to Consolidate, Letters to Judge, Continuances, Court Dates, Extensions, Problem Letters, and Payables (receipts) performed in the Traffic Division found that the current process used to record citations, motions, extensions, completions of traffic schools, and court docketing relies heavily on a paper trail of documentation even though all documents are electronically imaged and docketed (indexed). The system while effective is not efficient. The MIS Department (Clerk) has acquired case management software for the court system called *Case Maintenance (C3)*. It is anticipated that the traffic related modules would increase the efficiency of the current process.

This review found Traffic clerks hand writing information on Notices to Appear and on copies of scanned citations as a means of cross-referencing documents. Clerks also manually sort case documents and type manual entries, e.g., attorneys' & witnesses' names, for docket preparation. As noted above, funding constraints brought about by Revision 7 to Article V necessitate enhancing economy & efficiency. The Traffic Division's present software is the cause of this manual manipulation of data that is already in the system, and results in wasted time and human resources. While the C3 system is being developed and tested to fit the needs of the Traffic Division, Internal Audit noted the following specific areas currently lacking multiple data exchange that create inefficient use of resources. The following are critical processing issues noted as not meeting standards. The following operating areas are critical in planning for a more efficient data automation system:

1. Front Counter Processing:

In many instances, defendants and attorneys come to the clerk's office locations to request information and actions on a case. For example, the defendant may pay fines, elect traffic school, request a court hearing or request a continuance on a case. Clerks at the information counters currently use the Department of Highway Safety and Motor Vehicle Uniform Traffic Ticket (UTT) system to access case information and the contents of the electronic case file to assist in resolving the request. In many cases, new forms, such as clearance of a license suspension and school election form need to be created to satisfy the request. Presently, forms are completed manually in the presence of the clerk which take time resulting in long lines forming and decreasing the accuracy of data collected. In addition the clerk must docket the completed form. Current technology does not allow for pre-population of all forms that would save time at the counter providing more efficient customer service, increasing accuracy, and eliminating the manual process of document imaging for the docketing (indexing) step.

2. Public Viewing:

Workstations with simple image display and window access are not currently provided in the Traffic Division lobby so that attorneys and the public can make direct inquiries into the case files without clerk assistance. Presently, workstations are located in other areas of the court for public access. Furthermore, C3 should be web enabled allowing anyone with Internet access to be able to see case summary and status, in addition to being able to file and pay citations on-line. Proper security should prevent unauthorized access.

3. Courtroom Processing:

An increasing number of non-criminal traffic cases are being heard in court. In calendar year 2004 the civil traffic court heard 5,328 cases compared to 3,794 in calendar year 2003, a 40% increase. Actions in court create a history that must be tracked and in some instances may create new documents that must be kept in the case file. These actions presently are handwritten on various forms and on the Court Docket. The quality, legibility, and accuracy of these documents suffer (are lacking) depending on the judge, hearing officer, or deputy clerk who recorded the action.

4. Pre-Court Processing:

Prior to the beginning of Civil Traffic Court sessions, the court clerks are very busy with last minute requests shuffling through paper copies of electronic case files to accommodate last minute requests from attorneys and law enforcement. With the large increase in traffic cases heard in court, court dockets are averaging 51 cases per session requiring at least two court clerks to handle the volume of "paper copies" of court cases. In addition, where traffic court was held twice weekly in 2003, 2004 saw an increase to three days most weeks. Even though the majority of these cases end up as pleas to avoid points attached to driver's licenses, a great number of cases must be heard and acted on by the presiding officer, requiring manual recordings on paper by the traffic clerks. This is inefficient use of the Court Clerk's time since all of the case documents are available electronically.

5. Judge's Workbench:

Because of the increasing number of non-criminal traffic cases being heard in court sessions, court time takes up much of the clerk's staff resources often requiring at least two court clerks. Actions in court create a history that must be tracked and in some instances may create new documents that must be kept in the case file. Presently, the clerks must assemble copies of the documents from the electronic case file and the Driver License record of the defendant for the judge or hearing officer. It was observed that Judges and Hearing officers have access to computers on the bench but choose to use paper copies provided by the Traffic Division. If the Judges were trained on how to access electronic case information already on line valuable time could be saved allowing court clerks more time in assisting the judge or hearing officer and increase the accuracy of data and judgments recorded. These actions presently are handwritten on various forms and on the printed copy of the Court Docket. The quality, legibility, and accuracy of these documents and judgments are at risk depending on the judge, hearing officer, or deputy traffic clerk who recorded the action and must undergo several more unnecessary steps in post judgment and end of session processing.

6. End of Session Processing:

After hearing sessions are completed, court clerks key enter information that was manually recorded on the docket while in court to the final docket and TCATS. While the traffic court clerks are dedicated, manual entries are inefficient, particularly when processing large volumes of cases. In addition, two clerks are sometimes required in order to keep pace with the judge's decisions by searching for hard copies of cases taken out of order which often happens when the hearing

officer or judge first requests pleas. Automatic posting of information to the system would insure (vastly improve) accuracy, require one clerk, and reduce time required and improve accuracy when updating case histories.

RECOMMENDATION:

To insure that the new Traffic Division C3 Case Maintenance system improves Division efficiency and accuracy in addition to conserving time and clerk resources, we recommend the following:

- Include in present software development the ability to pre-populate all forms with information already available in the computer database.
- Provide traffic clerks simultaneous access to all case files.
- Incorporate on-line courtroom processing to reduce data errors and improve collections.
- Provide workstations in the Traffic Division for public use to save clerk's time. Also offer more options to enable traffic offenders to pay court fees and fines over the Internet. According to the *Functional Requirement Standards for Traffic Case Management Systems* approved in March 2005 by the Joint Technology Committee of The Conference of State Court Administrators, The National Association of Court Management, and The National Center for State Courts, this option has shown a significant increase in timeliness of payments and amounts paid as well as a decline in court appearances and work at the front counter.

Auditor's Note: Point & Pay online payment system became effective August 11, 2005.

- Incorporate Traffic Court Case Management System Functional Standards promulgated by the Board of Directors of the National Association for Court Management (NACM) adopted February 12, 2005 and the Board of Directors of the Conference of State Court Administrators (COSCA) adopted March 12, 2005.

Judge's Policy Is Outdated

The County Court and Clerk entered into an agreement on January 7, 1999, to enhance judicial economy and expedite requests regarding certain actions for the Court such as preparing motions for extension to pay fines, motions to elect school, and motions to dismiss by the officer who issued a citation. The agreement directs the Clerk to carry out certain functions such as actions relating to parking violations, which are no longer the responsibility of the Clerk. Effective December 2004 the County's Code Enforcement Department directs the disposition of parking violations.

The Traffic Violations Bureau (Traffic Division) is established in each county under Rule 6.100 (a), Florida Rules of Traffic Court and states:

*Establishment and Function. A traffic violations bureau shall be established in each county court by administrative order of the chief judge of the circuit in which the county court is located. The function of the bureau shall be to accept appearances, waivers of non-criminal hearings, admissions, payment of civil penalties for traffic infractions not requiring a mandatory hearing, and nolo contendere pleas under the authority of section 318.01(9) and (10), Florida Statutes. If any person's sentence for a criminal traffic offense or penalty for a traffic infraction in which the person elects to appear before an official includes the payment of a fine or civil penalty, payment may be made before the bureau. The bureau may also accept appearances, waivers of hearings, admissions, and payment of civil penalties as provided in section 318.18, Florida Statutes, in traffic infraction cases in which the driver originally elected, but was not required, to appear before an official prior to the date of the hearing. **The bureau shall act under the direction and control of the judges of the court.***

In accordance with the aforementioned rule, the Twentieth Judicial Circuit issued Local Rule I, dated February 26, 1979, establishing a Traffic Violation Bureau in Collier County as well as the other four counties in the Circuit. According to management, the Clerk's Traffic Division operates as the "Traffic Violations Bureau" for Collier County performing all the required functions as described in Rule 6.100 (a) and Local Rule I. As such, compliance with Judge's Policies and Administrative Orders are an integral part of the Traffic Division's operations and should be maintained in accordance with current rules and standards.

Currently the Traffic Division is preparing some of the Judge's Orders. Even though this function is not required by any state statute or local ordinance, it appears to follow Rule 6.100 (a), Florida Rules of Traffic Court that, in part, states, "...The bureau shall act under the direction and control of the judges of the court." As a result any orders prepared by the Traffic Division for the Judges should be documented either as an Administrative Order or part of the Judge's Policy.

RECOMMENDATION:

Because the agreement is over six years old and revision 7 of Article V has greatly impacted the Florida court system, we recommend review of all court related procedures the Traffic Division currently uses with the Judges and Court Administration, including Judge's Orders prepared by the Division. In addition, the Judge's Policy should be reviewed to compliance with current ordinances. We recommend regularly scheduled dialogue between court administration, judges, hearing officers, and Traffic Division to resolve any conflicting procedures, post judgment issues pending such as "stale" cases, computer training (updating technical environment issues), and scheduling issues.

Collections Policy is Not Cost Effective

The Civil Traffic Division processes payments received for fines and penalties according to prescribed amount. In some cases, payments received differ from the statutorily assessed amount for the non-criminal offense. For overpayments received Section 28.244, Florida Statute, requires the Clerk to refund overpayments that exceed \$5.00. If the amount of the overpayment is \$5.00 or less, the Clerk of the Circuit Court or a filing officer where the records are filed is not required to refund the amount of the overpayment unless the person who made the overpayment makes a written request.

In contrast, according to internal Traffic Policies and Procedures, traffic fines received by the Traffic Division that are short of the required amount due of \$1.00 or more require a letter to the defendant explaining the deficiency and requiring the shortage be received before the defendant's license can be reinstated. Section 34.191, Florida Statute states "All fines and forfeitures arising from offenses **tried in the county court** shall be collected and accounted for by the clerk of the court..." The cost of processing a request for \$1.00 is not cost efficient and puts the affected defendant at risk because of the possibility of license suspension for a small sum of money. There are 5 steps required in processing a \$1.00 demand remittance from defendants beginning with the Traffic Division's correspondence to the deposit with the Collections Department in addition to operating costs such as postage. The majority of the demands for payment correspondence from the Traffic Division to defendants involve shortages ranging from \$1.00 to \$3.50.

RECOMMENDATION:

We recommend seeking legislative authority to change the dollar threshold to a more practical and cost efficient amount consistent with the \$5.00 requirement in Section 28.244, Florida Statute, dealing with refunds issued by the clerk for overpayments, specifically with those that were not tried in the county court.

Procedure For Correcting Citation Errors is Inefficient

Uniform traffic citations are processed in the Traffic (Civil) Division through the Traffic Citation Accounting Transmission System (TCATS). TCATS is a system maintained by the Florida Association of Court Clerks (FACC) through a contract with the Department of Highway Safety and Motor Vehicles to provide accountability of traffic citation information. The most important and time-consuming function carried out by the Traffic Division is the correct recording of traffic citations to the traffic computer system. The completed citations received from law enforcement sometimes contain errors such as incorrect statute references. The Traffic Division currently issues a "Citation Discrepancy Memo" to the issuing law enforcement officer. The officer is notified by telephone of the discrepancy and noted on the memo. The memo documents the discrepancy and together with the deficient citation is indexed and scanned into the system by the Assistant Traffic Supervisor by case number into the computer system. Payments received for tickets should be in the system as soon as possible because payments received without the citation in TCATS require redundant processing for the traffic clerks. The original hard citation stays in the original form but the

scanned citation electronic copy is changed to reflect the correct information with the referenced "Citation Discrepancy Memo".

RECOMMENDATION:

Where data is missing or in error such as statute number the computer application should support automatically routing a printed copy of the citation back to the issuing officer for correction and resubmission. This procedure properly validates and documents any changes to the citation. In order to reduce citation errors, Division management should schedule periodic meetings with law enforcement agencies to discuss errors, provide training, and seek corrective action.

Traffic Division's Response:

We have monthly criminal agency meetings where these problems are discussed. Unfortunately, the top supervisors for the road deputies fail to attend most months.

Processing of Checks Lacks Proper Controls

Checks received through the mail for payment of traffic infractions are sometimes kept in the Traffic Division in the "pending" work bin overnight, unsecured for a period of up to a few days until the problems in identifying the payment source information is resolved. It was observed on several occasions that these checks are not restrictively endorsed at the time of receipt. The absence of such controls increases the risk that revenues and cash receipts may be lost or stolen. Restrictive endorsement at the point of collection limits the negotiability of checks should they be lost or diverted

Internal Audit randomly tested the amount of fines assessed and the fee distribution schedule on selected citation receipts. According to the sample tested, the Traffic Division is currently imposing fines in accordance with amended Administrative Order 6.1 dated February 7, 2005 relating to Civil Traffic and Section 318.18, Florida Statute, which relates to civil penalties imposed in non-criminal traffic infractions.

RECOMMENDATION:

We recommend that all checks be restrictively endorsed at the point of collection. In addition, all checks received with incomplete source information should be researched the day received to determine the correct disposition and deposited in tact the same day. Copies of checks should be made to document the remittance during the time necessary to research the disposition. Checks received in late afternoon should be recorded and held in a secure area overnight for safekeeping.

We also recommend that the Division continue to monitor changes in fines and fee distributions as Revision 7 to Article V evolves.

Traffic Division's Response:

With the amount of checks we receive in the mail, I don't know how the traffic clerks could endorse the checks immediately. It would be very time consuming and we don't have any extra time. Also, the department is a secure department that has the regular door lock plus the dead bolt at night.

Accounts Receivable Management System For Citation Payment Plan (R.I.D.E.) Lacks Proper Controls

Current law requires the Clerk to enroll any person seeking to defer payment of fees, service charges, costs, or fines imposed by law in a payment plan corresponding to the individual's ability to pay. Furthermore, Ch. 2003-402, *Laws of Florida*, requires clerks to shift from a case-based data collection system to an accounts receivable system. In order to broaden collection efforts, the Twentieth Judicial Circuit Court issued an administrative order on February 23, 2001 establishing a program in Collier County to facilitate the reinstatement of driver license privileges for those individuals who have outstanding civil traffic fines in Collier County and who would otherwise be eligible for drivers' licenses in the State of Florida. The program authorized by the Court is known as the "R.I.D.E." program; an acronym for "Re-Instate Driving Easily."

The present RIDE data collection and recording automation system was developed in 2003 by the MIS Department to collect contract (applicant) data, establish installment dates, monitor and track collections, and post payments for distribution to the Clerk and Florida Department of Revenue.

There are approximately 35 to 40 contracts or outstanding R.I.D.E. accounts as of April 21, 2005. We were unable to independently verify the exact dollar balance because the current system does not provide control totals or management report options. In addition, RIDE is currently an internally maintained system within the Civil Traffic Division that is not part of the Clerk's Collection Department. The Clerk's Bookkeeping Department does not record or account for the accounts receivable or outstanding amount on the Clerk's books of original entry. As a result, we were unable to independently verify balances to books of original entry. In addition, there is no control list or schedule of outstanding accounts to reconcile to individual account folders.

RECOMMENDATION:

In order to provide essential controls and increase functionality (usefulness) we recommend the following:

1. Include options in the program for management reports that provide account balance information and individual participant detail balance totals.
2. Allow aging of individual accounts and reconcile to D6 reports at least monthly.
3. Provide training to front counter clerks in order to identify qualified program candidates, promote program participation, and process required paper work.

4. Amend the February 23, 2001 Twentieth Judicial Circuit Administrative Order that authorizes the clerk to charge certain fees for administering the R.I.D.E. program to agree with current fees charged and authorized in Section 318.18, Florida Statutes.

Traffic Division's Response:

The RIDE program will become a function of the Collections Department when the C3 system is complete for criminal. Traffic will no longer handle the payment plans at that time. The intention was always for collections to handle this but the 2 computer systems are not currently compatible.

**Fine Collection and Issuing of Receipts Are Not Simultaneous,
Reducing Control Over Collections**

The process of collecting fines on citations is decentralized between the Traffic Division and Clerk Cashier. Traffic clerks issue un-validated receipts prior to defendants remitting payment for the traffic fines. The defendant, with the un-validated receipt in hand, is then directed to the cashier window to remit payment and have the receipt validated. Even though the Clerk Cashier is physically located within a few steps of the Traffic Division window some defendants are able to walk out the door without paying once they have the receipt in hand. As of June 6, 2005 the Clerk's *Un-Validated Receipts By Department Report* for the Traffic Division showed 26 un-validated receipts representing 21 cases totaling \$2,300.70 for the period March 22, 2005 to June 6, 2005. The Traffic Division must then act on the report of non-payment by correcting a whole host of data elements in the traffic citation TCATS computer system.

RECOMMENDATION:

The Traffic Division should take steps to issue a validated receipt for payment of traffic fines only when funds have been remitted. This can be accomplished one of two ways; by either charging the traffic clerks at the window with the responsibility of traffic fine collection or remotely printing the actual receipt at the cashier station with a copy of the citation charges going to the defendant to confirm the identity of the payee at the cashier window. This would improve control over collections, increase revenue, and prevent redundant computer data entry and processing.

Since the collection system affects other Departments of the Clerk including those that have not been reviewed by Internal Audit, such as Criminal, we recommend that upon review of all Departments the full impact of receipt and collections be evaluated and uniform procedures be recommended at that time.

Article V – Traffic

Conclusion

Technology is an integral part of Article V and the implementation of Revision 7. Integrated technology is important in the courts system because so many offices gather and use the same information. For instance, an integrated state courts system would network traffic ticket data from local and state law enforcement, the clerk of court who first assigns a number to the case, and judges who try the case. Because most computer systems are not integrated to communicate with each other, as is the case with the present case management system, the Legislature has helped enhance the court system's accountability and efficiency by addressing the shortcoming in standardized system needs by establishing an Article V Technology Board under Section 29.0086, Florida Statutes, to establish standards, protocols, and processes in a communication services environment. In addition, the Legislature has enacted Section 29.008 (1)(f) 2 to mandate the implementation of an integrated computer system statewide. Productivity and efficiency could be greatly enhanced in the Traffic Division if the planned court system is implemented by the July 1, 2006 operational date.

During our review, we observed excellent customer service, especially in answering public inquiries over the phone. Several traffic clerks are bilingual which makes the Division more efficient. One of the areas in the Division that appeared under the most pressure was answering customer calls. One person is designated each week to cover one incoming line available to the general public. While phone traffic is sporadic, the large increase in issued citations and court requests would suggest that incoming calls are also increasing. There was no hard data available to determine the number of calls taken or missed. As part of the data automation efforts, we recommend that data be collected to record the number of incoming calls to provide sufficient information on the efficiency of the current procedure.

We thank the personnel of the Traffic Division for their cooperation during this audit.

Traffic Division's Response:

The audit was well done and the audit findings were received by the department as constructive suggestions. The auditor really took his time to learn the traffic department and made excellent recommendations.

It should be noted that many of the audit findings will be addressed and improved upon in the new unified court system. The implementation of this system has the Traffic

department set for the second department to be updated. The new unified court system may offer an improved process of issuing receipts for traffic fine payments and the problem with defendants leaving without actually paying their fines. But, even if we do not make any changes to the cashiering processes, the fact that the ticket isn't paid may result in a suspension for that defendant. The Deputy Clerk does not issue a validated receipt. We have chosen to name the un-validated document a "receipt" when we should refer to them as an invoice. It really isn't a receipt until the fine is paid. At any rate, the level of automation in the current Traffic system hinders, rather than helps, this department.

The lack of automation and the dramatic increase in the number of citations being issued in our County are the causes of our response that the department doesn't have time to perform certain recommendations found in the audit.

It should be noted that the Sheriff's Office is working with a program that will send electronic citation data to our office in the very near future. This will prove to be a tremendous time saver to the Clerks in the Traffic department and will provide more accurate citation data.

I believe we can expect an improved work product from the Traffic department when these various automation functions are installed.