

**OFFICE OF THE INSPECTOR GENERAL  
CITY OF BALTIMORE**



**Isabel Mercedes Cumming  
Inspector General**

**Investigative  
Report Synopsis**

**OIG Case # 20-0024-I**

**Issued: July 2, 2020**



OFFICE OF THE INSPECTOR GENERAL  
Isabel Mercedes Cumming, Inspector General  
City Hall, Suite 635  
100 N. Holliday Street  
Baltimore, MD 21202



July 2, 2020

Dear Citizens of Baltimore City,

Over the past year, the Office of the Inspector General (OIG) has completed five investigations involving the Bureau of Procurement (BOP) and has identified over \$1,017,000 in waste. During those numerous investigations, the OIG received complaints that the Executive Leadership Team of BOP created a toxic work environment, verbally abused subordinate employees, and mismanaged the office. The OIG investigated after it received complaints that the Executive Leadership Team created fears of retaliation against potential whistleblowers seeking to end the abuse of power in the BOP office. The mission of the OIG is to promote accountability, efficiency, and integrity in city government, as well as to investigate complaints of fraud, financial waste, and abuse. For this investigation, the OIG interviewed more than 30 witnesses, including current and past BOP employees.

A majority of those interviewed described instances when the Executive Leadership Team engaged in hostile behavior towards BOP employees. Witnesses provided examples where a member of the Executive Leadership Team, the Senior Manager, openly berated and yelled at subordinate employees, diminished the expertise and experience of BOP personnel, and belittled staff. Witnesses also reported that the Senior Manager's criticism of the staff often exceeded the bounds of their professional conduct and bordered on personal attacks, on occasion reducing employees to tears. Employees reported that the Senior Manager once threatened physical violence at a meeting. The OIG's investigation determined that the Executive Leadership Team knew of the Senior Manager's conduct. Other witnesses noted the Senior Manager's behavior was permitted, despite receiving complaints that she was driving out BOP employees. When interviewed by the OIG, the Senior Manager was not alarmed employees had described hostile encounters with her. In fact, the Senior Manager advised the structure of BOP was designed for her to be the "pit bull."

Evidence gathered during the more than thirty interviews substantiated claims that a culture of fear exists at BOP, wherein employees are afraid of retaliation if they complain about the Executive Leadership Team. Witnesses stated that at a meeting the Senior Manager confiscated employee cell phones and instructed supervisors to remove employees she did not like—under threat of termination themselves if the supervisors protested. The OIG learned that employees were told not to discuss complaints with the Director of Finance nor were employees comfortable discussing their problems with their BOP Administrator<sup>1</sup>. Multiple witnesses believed the BOP Administrator had a close professional relationship with the Executive Leadership Team and was for that reason unwilling to address employee concerns. Witnesses stated they feared that the BOP Administrator and the Executive Leadership Team openly discussed employee complaints. The OIG determined that all of this created a toxic work environment with little internal remedy for BOP employees.

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<sup>1</sup> BOP Administrator is responsible for internal HR matters among other responsibilities. They are not department of Human Resources staff.

**REPORT FRAUD, WASTE AND ABUSE**

**HOTLINE:** 443-984-3476/800-417-0430 **EMAIL:** [OIG@BALTIMORECITY.GOV](mailto:OIG@BALTIMORECITY.GOV) **WEBSITE:** [OIG.BALTIMORECITY.GOV](http://OIG.BALTIMORECITY.GOV)

BOP has experienced increased turnover in recent years: under the Executive Leadership Team, the BOP office's turnover rate more than doubled since 2017. During the investigation, the OIG learned BOP employees face an "overwhelming workload" due to staff vacancies, little training, and no established standard operating procedures. Even a member of the Executive Leadership Team, when interviewed, stated that if she were a buyer or a supervisor, she would not stay in BOP. Normally, training is conducted by the supervisors but due to the high turnover and heavy workloads, witnesses reported that the supervisors are unable to adequately train their procurement specialists. The current management of BOP caused contracts to expire without renewal, costing the city more money to maintain them. The BOP backlog slowed down requests from supporting city agencies. The Executive Leadership Team deterred the use of compensatory time and overtime, supervisors reported that they were too overworked to manage their teams, BOP employees complained of burn-out, and people worked outside of their job titles. The OIG determined these additional obstacles inhibited employees from reducing their insurmountable workload.

In October 2019, the Executive Leadership Team wrote a "White Paper" report analyzing the BOP office and recommended structural changes (Exhibit 1). However, the White Paper did not address problems with upper management. The Executive Leadership Team blamed most of the office's problems and low employee morale on uncompetitive city salaries and generational differences—the alleged root of the high turnover. The Department of Finance received the White Paper and hired two more managers but many procurement specialist vacancies remained. Even with the new hires, under the Executive Leadership Team there was still a significant lack of employee training and few standardized processes and procedures within BOP. New employees were not properly integrated into the office. Communication issues and irregularly conducted exit interviews by the Executive Leadership Team further prevented the development of remedial BOP policies.

The Executive Leadership Team created an unchecked hostile work environment. This toxic environment coupled with little standardized training for new employees and a high turnover rate increased employee workload, reduced training opportunities, and backlogged requests from supporting city agencies. At the time of this report, part of the BOP Executive Leadership Team still manages the office and the OIG continues to receive complaints. The OIG referred its report to the Department of Finance for an official response.

Sincerely,



Isabel Mercedes Cumming, Inspector General  
Office of the Inspector General

Cc: Hon. Bernard C. "Jack" Young, Mayor of Baltimore City  
Hon. Brandon Scott, President, City Council  
Hon. Joan M. Pratt, Baltimore City Comptroller  
Honorable Members of the Baltimore City Council  
Hon. Dana P. Moore, Acting City Solicitor

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