

Report of Investigation

Allegation that Health Department employee Mara Hahn personally benefited from the submission of a \$4,000 invoice dated May 26, 2017 for food and supplies purchased by the Conrad Park Booster Club for the Hollygrove Family Fest held on May 13, 2017.

Final Report • October 14, 2019



FINAL
REPORT OF INVESTIGATION

[REDACTED]

TITLE: Allegation that Health Department employee Mara Hahn personally benefited from the submission of a \$4,000 invoice dated May 26, 2017 for food and supplies purchased by the Conrad Park Booster Club for the Hollygrove Family Fest held on May 13, 2017.

LOCATION OF OCCURRENCE: Healthy Start New Orleans, Best Babies Zone Project, 1616 Caffin Avenue, New Orleans, LA 70117

DATE OF OCCURRENCE: The City received the invoice on May 31, 2017.

INVESTIGATED BY: Investigator Michael J. Centola, (504) 681-3229

VIOLATIONS: Louisiana Code of Governmental Ethics, La. R.S. 42:1112 A: No public servant, except as provided in R.S. 42:1120, shall participate in a transaction in which he has a personal substantial economic interest of which he may be reasonably expected to know involving the governmental entity.

ACTION TAKEN: Referred to the City of New Orleans, Department of Health for administrative action.

BASIS FOR INVESTIGATION

On August 3, 2017, the Office of Inspector General (OIG) interviewed City of New Orleans (City), Department of Health (DoH) Director Marsha Broussard and Deputy Director Tomekia Dunkley regarding allegations that Health Project & Planning Specialist Mara Hahn had engaging in a series of meal-related procurements [REDACTED]

[REDACTED] The Memorandum of Interview (MOI) for Broussard and Dunkley is attached as **Exhibit 1.**

During this interview, Broussard and Dunkley also expressed concern about a telephone call the DoH received from [REDACTED], Treasurer for the Conrad Park Booster Club (CPBC). He called to inquire about a check that his club was due from the City, but had not received. [REDACTED] was asked to complete an affidavit requesting payment and was sent a copy of the \$4,000 invoice dated May 26, 2016, the DoH received from the CPBC on May 31, 2017.

The \$4,000 invoice dated May 26, 2017, addressed to Healthy Start New Orleans, Best Babies Zone Project, 1616 Caffin Avenue, New Orleans, LA 70117, described food, beverages, and cutlery purchased by the CPBC for the Hollygrove Family Fest held on May 13, 2017. The invoice is attached as **Exhibit 2**.

█ subsequently called the DoH and told them that he had not submitted an invoice for \$4,000. He further stated the CPBC was only due \$2,000 and the other \$2,000 was for “Ms. Maya.” According to Broussard and Dunkley, the \$4,000 check was sent to the CPBC, 3400 Hamilton St, which is the Conrad Playground. This location does not have an office or mailbox to which the check could be delivered. Dunkley added the \$4,000 check was never negotiated and remains missing.

Broussard and Dunkley are no longer employed by the DoH. According to the current DoH Director, Dr. Jennifer Avegno, the City planned to pay for the cost of hosting the Hollygrove Family Fest with funds from the Best Babies Zone Grant. This grant ended on May 31, 2017.

BACKGROUND

Hahn was terminated from her position as a Health Project & Planning Specialist on July 14, 2017, for Fiscal Misconduct. She was cited for engaging in a series of meal-related procurements █

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However, the termination letter did not contain any reference to the Hollygrove Family Fest. The termination letter is attached as **Exhibit 3**. Hahn appealed her termination to the Civil Service Commission (Commission). On November 20, 2017, the Commission issued an agreement indicating Hahn accepted the offer of reinstatement to the DoH as a full time employee and providing for back pay reimbursement from the date of her termination. This agreement provided no any reasons for Hahn’s reinstatement. The reinstatement agreement is attached as **Exhibit 4**.

EXTENT AND RESULTS OF INVESTIGATION

On April 26, 2017, the CPBC submitted a \$4,000 quote to Healthy Start New Orleans, Best Babies Zone Project, 1616 Caffin Avenue, New Orleans, LA 70117, to provide food for the Hollygrove Family Fest. The quote is attached as **Exhibit 5**. Two restaurants, The █ and The █, also submitted quotes. The quotes are attached as **Exhibits 6** and **7**.

On May 2, 2017, an Informal Bid Quote Form dated April 26, 2017, was submitted to the City Department of Finance, Purchasing Bureau, listing the quotes submitted by █ (\$4,707), The █ (\$4,682.70), and the CPBC (\$4,000). The number “3” designating the third

quote on the form in the amount of \$4,000 from the CPBC was circled. This form also lists Hahn as the contact person. This Bid Quote Form is attached as **Exhibit 8**.

The Hollygrove Family Fest was held at Conrad Park on May 13, 2017. The termination letter issued to Hahn on July 14, 2017 does not reference her involvement in the Hollygrove Family Fest (**See Exhibit 3**).

On May 31, 2017, the City received a \$4,000 invoice from the CPBC dated May 26, 2017, which described food, beverages, and cutlery purchased by the CPBC for the Hollygrove Family Fest held on May 13, 2017 (**See Exhibit 2**).

On June 7, 2017, the City, Department of Finance, Bureau of Accounting processed a \$4,000 Request for Payment Voucher/Wire payable to the CPBC dated May 31, 2017. The Request for Payment Voucher/Wire is attached as **Exhibit 9**.

On June 21, 2017, the City issued a \$4,000 check payable to the CPBC. This check was never negotiated or returned to the City. It may have been lost because it was addressed to the CPBC at 3400 Hampton Street, the location of the Conrad Playground, rather than a business or a residence. The check is attached as **Exhibit 10**.

On September 19, 2017, OIG investigators interviewed CPBC Treasurer [REDACTED]. The MOI for [REDACTED] is attached as **Exhibit 11**. [REDACTED] recalled that sometime in April 2017 he attended a meeting at which Hahn asked him if the CPBC would be willing to cook, serve, and "upfront" the money for food and miscellaneous items for the "Healthy Start Family Fest", to be held at Conrad Park on May 13, 2017. [REDACTED] told Hahn that CPBC would cook, serve the food, and clean up the grounds, but that CPBC did not have the money to "upfront" several thousand dollars for the purchase of the food. Hahn told [REDACTED] she had a budget of \$4,000 for the event and whatever funds were not spent on food, the CPBC would get the remaining funds for cooking and cleaning up. [REDACTED] was shown a copy of a flyer that advertised the Healthy Start Family Fest as the Hollygrove Family Fest; and listed the Fest as being hosted by the CPBC and Healthy Start New Orleans [REDACTED] identified the flyer as being for the event and said it was distributed throughout the Hollygrove neighborhood. The flyer is attached as **Exhibit 12**.

[REDACTED] said that Hahn contacted him about a month after the event asking for money for the reimbursement of the food she purchased for the Fest. [REDACTED] thought this was strange since he thought the DoH would have purchased the food. CPBC men who worked the event told [REDACTED] they assumed Hahn purchased the food using her personal credit card.

During this interview, ██████ was also shown a copy of a \$4,000 invoice dated May 26, 2017, from the CPBC, addressed to Healthy Start New Orleans, Best Babies Zone Project, 1616 Caffin Avenue, New Orleans, LA 70117. **(See Exhibit 2)**. ██████ replied he had not seen the invoice before and did not authorize the invoice nor had the CPBC.

On May 2, 2019, OIG investigators met with Mara Hahn at the Sanchez Multi-Purpose Center, 1616 Caffin Street, New Orleans, LA, and identified themselves as official OIG investigators. "City of New Orleans Office of Inspector General-Administrative Investigation Form-1120" was read to Hahn:

It is your legal duty to cooperate with the Office of Inspector General during this Administrative Investigation. Anything you say cannot be used against you in any Criminal proceedings. Anything you say can only be used in Administrative proceedings.

OIG Investigators gave the form to Hahn who read it silently. Hahn said she understood the form and had no questions. Hahn signed and dated the form in the presence of OIG investigators who also signed and dated the form. The fully executed Form-1120 is attached as **Exhibit 13**.

Hahn recalled the Hollygrove Family Fest was an event she helped coordinate as part of her responsibilities as the Performance Manager of the Healthy Start Program. A few days prior to the event, Hahn and others realized the CPBC did not have enough funds to purchase the needed food and supplies for the event. Hahn decided that she would purchase the items needed and, once the CPBC was paid, they would repay her the amount she personally spent for the items. Hahn offered to provide the OIG with email messages, which she contends documented this agreement.

Hahn stated that she used her personal credit/check card to make the purchase from Restaurant Depot for \$1,487.13. Hahn provided a copy of the bank statement and receipt documenting the purchase. The Restaurant Depot receipt is attached as **Exhibit 14**. Hahn never worked with the CPBC prior to this event and has not since.

On May 3, 2019, Hahn forwarded an email dated July 24, 2017, sent to her by CPBC Member ██████ stated, "Due to the lack of funds at that time, Ms. Mara Hahn volunteered to pay for the food upfront and was willing to get reimbursed once Conrad received payment for being a vendor for the event." DoH terminated Hahn on July 14, 2017. ██████ sent this email to Hahn at ██████ ten days later. The email is attached as **Exhibit 15**.

During the interview, Hahn was shown a \$4,000 invoice dated May 26, 2017, from the CPBC, 3400 Hamilton Street, New Orleans LA addressed to the Healthy Start New Orleans, Best Babies Zone Project, 1616 Caffin Avenue, New Orleans, LA 70117, for food and supplies for the Hollygrove Family Fest. Hahn did not recall seeing this invoice before, although she did recall assisting ██████ in the creation of the invoice. Hahn is sure she provided a blank copy of the invoice to ██████ and probably assisted ██████ in creating the invoice in a telephone conversation. Hahn did not remember who set the prices listed on the invoice. According to Hahn, 3400 Hampton Street is the location of the Conrad Playground.

Hahn recalled ██████ contacting her numerous time both personally and by telephone inquiring about payment for the event. ██████ said CPBC needed money to purchase football equipment for the playground. Hahn directed ██████ to the City to inquire about the payment. Hahn recently learned the CPBC did receive a check from the City and ██████ has stopped calling her.

Hahn was shown a \$2,000 invoice dated September 24, 2018, submitted by the CPBC to the City. The invoice referenced food service distribution for the Hollygrove Spring Fest. Hahn said she had never seen this invoice. The invoice is attached as **Exhibit 16**. According to Hahn, the ██████ Street address on the invoice was ██████ residence.

Hahn has not recouped the approximately \$1,500 she personally spent for the event from either the City or the grantor, the University of California at Berkley. She has not discussed this with ██████ or anyone else with the CPBC. Hahn believes the original \$4,000 sum was invoiced to the grant.

When Hahn discussed this matter with the City Attorney's Office, Asst. City Attorney Corwin St. Raymond advised her there was no investigation concerning the Hollygrove Family Festival. His signature appears on her reinstatement agreement (**See Exhibit 4**). The MOI for Mara Hahn is attached as **Exhibit 17**.

According to DoH Director Avegno, the \$4,000 check (**See Exhibit 4**) was cancelled because it was never cashed. The \$4,000 check was returned to the closed-out grant. This grant ended on May 31, 2017. Therefore, the entire \$4,000 is still sitting encumbered as a fund balance in "org code 3689." The \$4,000 is essentially untouchable because payments arising from invoices submitted beyond the grant period cannot be processed on the closed-out grant.

According to DoH Director Avegno, the City issued a \$2,000 check to the CPBC on April 16, 2019, in response to the \$2,000 invoice dated September 24, 2018, referencing food service distribution for the Hollygrove Spring Fest (**See Exhibit 16**). She added that this sum was paid out of the City General Funds. The negotiated \$2,000 check is attached as **Exhibit 18**.

On July 30, 2019, Hahn resigned from her position as Grants and Performance Manager for Healthy Start New Orleans effective August 10, 2019. Her letter of resignation is attached **Exhibit 19**. At the time of her resignation, Hahn was aware that she was under investigation by the OIG (**See Exhibit 17**).

CONCLUSIONS

Hahn had an agreement with the CPBC, as shown in the email from [REDACTED] Conrad Booster Club Member (**See Exhibit 15**), specifying that she would be repaid for the expenses she incurred in purchasing food for the Hollygrove Family Fest. Hahn subsequently assisted in the preparation of the \$4,000 invoice from CPBC in order to recoup the \$1,487.13 she spent on the purchase of food and supplies for use at the Hollygrove Family Fest.

Hahn may have violated La. R.S. 42:1112, Participation in Certain Transactions Involving the Governmental Entity by purchasing food for the Hollygrove Family Festival and arranging with the CPBC to be reimbursed once the CPBC received payment from the City.

According La. R.S. 42:1112, Participation in Certain Transactions Involving the Governmental Entity:

- A. No public servant, except as provided in R.S. 42:1120, shall participate in a transaction in which he has a personal substantial economic interest of which he may be reasonably expected to know involving the governmental entity.

RECOMMENDATIONS

DoH employees should receive training regarding the City's procurement process.

This information is provided to you for any action you deem necessary. Please respond within 30 days as to what action you decide to take concerning these matters. Please contact Investigator Michael Centola at [REDACTED] or via email at [REDACTED] if you have any question regarding this matter. I can be contacted at [REDACTED] or via email at [REDACTED]. Thank you for your assistance in this matter.

EXHIBITS ATTACHED

Exhibit No.	Description
Exhibit 1	Memorandum of Interview for DoH Director Marsha Broussard and Deputy Director Tomekia Dunkley dated August 3, 2017 (2 pages)
Exhibit 2	\$4,000 invoice, which the City received on May 31, 2017, addressed to Healthy Start New Orleans, Best Babies Zone Project, 1616 Caffin Avenue, New Orleans, LA 70117 and dated May 26, 2017 (1 page)
Exhibit 3	Termination letter issued to Mara Hahn on July 14, 2017 (2 pages)
Exhibit 4	Mara Hahn reinstatement agreement issued on November 20, 2017 (4 pages)
Exhibit 5	\$4,000 quote submitted by Conrad Park Booster Club to Healthy Start New Orleans, Best Babies Zone Project, 1616 Caffin Avenue, New Orleans, LA 70117, dated April 26, 2017 (1 page)
Exhibit 6	\$4,707 quote from [REDACTED] dated April 19, 2017 (1 page)
Exhibit 7	\$4,682.70 quote from [REDACTED] dated April 26, 2017 (1 page)
Exhibit 8	Informal Bid Quote Form dated April 26, 2017 (1 page)
Exhibit 9	\$4,000 Request for Payment Voucher/Wire payable to the Conrad Park Booster Club dated May 31, 2017 (1 page)
Exhibit 10	\$4,000 check payable to the Conrad Park Booster Club dated June 21, 2017 (1 page)
Exhibit 11	Memorandum of Interview for [REDACTED] dated September 19, 2017 (3 pages)
Exhibit 12	Hollygrove Family Fest flyer (1 page)
Exhibit 13	City of New Orleans Office of Inspector General-Administrative Investigation Form-1120 signed by Mara Hahn on May 2, 2019 (1 page)
Exhibit 14	Restaurant Depot receipt in the amount of \$1,487.13 (6 pages)
Exhibit 15	Email sent to Mara Hahn by [REDACTED] Conrad Booster Club Member dated July 24, 2017 (1 page)
Exhibit 16	\$2,000 invoice submitted by the Conrad Booster Club dated September 24, 2018 (1 page)
Exhibit 17	Memorandum of Interview for Mara Hahn dated May 2, 2019 (2 pages)
Exhibit 18	\$2,000 check payable to the Conrad Booster Club dated April 16, 2019 (1 page)
Exhibit 19	Hahn Letter of Resignation dated July 30, 2019 with an effective date of August 10, 2019 (1 page)