

Investigations

The Investigations Unit is responsible to investigate all cases of alleged fraud within the agency. In doing so, the unit will have the responsibility to perform all investigations, determine the type, document the amount of any over payments and submit the cases to the District Attorney's office for possible criminal prosecution.

The unit also performs investigations of applications for assistance, prior to eligibility being determined. While this helps to ferret out possible fraud, it also helps to ensure that eligible individuals received the benefits that they are entitled to.

In 2009, there were **over 1374 cases opened for investigation** an increase of 12% from the previous year. These investigations are referred to the unit by in-house referrals as well as referrals received by community members.

The agency has a toll free tip line,
1-866-843-8759 or 746-2388
that the public can utilize to report concerns of fraudulent activities.

The Front End Detection System referral is a state mandated form that is submitted to the state for approval and uses indicators, such as Supported by Friends and/or Family, to refer for investigation. While the number of FEDS referrals increased in 2009 to 553, the total savings to the county decreased to \$336,198.00 based on the fact that less fraudulent cases were noted.

The Eligibility Verification Review referral process is used to investigate

those cases where eligibility is for Single or Childless Individuals. This program is not state mandated but the agency feels it is important to use all resources available to verify all eligibility information. Due to changes in programmatic eligibility the EVR process was limited to only Temporary Assistance program at the end of January 2008. There were **75 referrals** made in 2009 representing **a savings to the county of \$78,936.00** which would have otherwise been provided through Temporary Assistance benefits.

Myth vs. Fact

A common **myth** is that the Investigations Unit wants to get everyone off assistance and have them arrested.

The **fact** is that in reality, the unit works with the client and other divisions to make sure that everyone who applies for assistance gets the benefits they are entitled to without compromising the County's resources.

In 2009, work continued with the Washington County Sheriff's office and District Attorney's office to recover overpayments due to fraud. There were **16 arrests** involving **over \$93,022.75** in assistance paid out that clients were not eligible to receive. **The agency has been able to recover \$86,920.71 in money owed** to the agency for overpayments. This money includes cases that were prosecuted as well as cases that were found to have been overpaid but not prosecuted. The agency continues to collect money on

a monthly basis to accommodate clients who are unable to pay the entire overpayment in full. There will be ongoing monthly payments made to the agency through repayment agreements and/or probation, or those who were unable to make full restitution and were put on probation from 3-5 years.

During the year, the agency instituted **22 Intentional Program Violations (IPV)** which are agreements that an individual signs stating they agree not to receive benefits for a period of 6 months to 2 years, depending on the program and the amount overpaid. Through this process the agency was able to save **\$89,754.00**.

This unit is responsible for the coordination of agency Fair Hearings related to Temporary Assistance, Food Stamps or Medicaid. A Fair Hearing is called by a client when they believe that the agency has made a mistake in budgeting their household's benefits. This involves the preparation of formal summaries and documentation that will be submitted to the Administrative Law Judge to help support the agency's action in a case. In 2009 there were **123 Fair Hearings held, a 33% increase from the previous year. All 123 Fair Hearings were found in favor of the agency's decision.**

During the course of the year, the unit initiated a process of calling the client to come in before the hearing to discuss the matter with the hope of resolving the hearing. This has proven to be very successful and serves to reduce the amount of resources spent in preparing for the more formal fair hearing.

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This year two workers in the unit took on the challenge of “cold calling” clients directly who owed money on outstanding contracts to the agency. Through their combined efforts they are averaging over \$1,000.00 per month coming back into the agency with the total for 2009 being \$13,635.01.

The Investigations unit continues to participate in weekly meetings to discuss cases involving homelessness in an effort to meet the needs of this

ever growing population. In addition, field visits to hotels/motels are made by unit staff in an effort to ensure a client’s compliance with the terms and conditions of a homeless placement.

The Unit is also responsible for verifying the income, resources and assets of applicants applying for benefits. The unit verifies these through several sources to include Department of Motor Vehicles, Department of Labor, Workers

Compensation, NYS Disability, wage clearances to employers, Insurance companies, deed searches, and bank clearances. By doing a clearance on every applying adult, the agency can accurately determine their eligibility for the programs they are requesting. Also, the agency can, at times, assist the client in their attempts to access required documentation, thus allowing them to receive the benefits to which they are entitled to by law.

| Searches Completed | 2007 | 2008 | 2009 |
|------------------------------|------|------|-------|
| Department of Motor Vehicles | 1584 | 5212 | 4494 |
| Department of Labor | 1198 | 1250 | 1018 |
| Wage Clearances | 730 | 710 | 716 |
| Workers Compensation | 33 | 41 | 17 |
| NYS Disability | 94 | 64 | 40 |
| Insurance | 145 | 97 | 86 |
| Bank Clearances | 5300 | 9611 | 17306 |