



State of Florida
Department of Children and Families

Charlie Crist
Governor

Robert A. Butterworth
Secretary

Office of Inspector General

Enhancing Public Trust in Government

REDACTED

IG Investigation

2008-0017

March 6, 2008

Sheryl G. Steckler
Inspector General

Keith R. Parks
Chief of Investigations

*“Provide Leadership in the promotion of accountability
and integrity of State Government.”*

Office of Inspector General
Investigations Section
Report Summary
Case Number: 2008-0017

Introduction:

On November 7, 2007, the Office of Inspector General (OIG) received a memorandum from Circuit 1 Operations Program Administrator (OPA) Pamela Anderson regarding a Quality Assurance (QA)¹ review that was conducted at her request, on all open investigations that were assigned to former² Circuit 1 Child Protective Investigator (CPI) Lynette Bledsoe. Ms. Anderson states in the memorandum that on November 5, 2007, Child Protective Investigator Supervisor (CPIS) Patricia Haley³ responded to the home ([REDACTED]) of [REDACTED] (hereinafter referred to as "the mother"), [REDACTED] (age 15; hereinafter referred to as "Child 1"), and her sister, [REDACTED] (age 13 years; hereinafter referred to as "Child 2"). Child 1 explained to Ms. Haley that she had never met nor did she speak with Ms. Bledsoe on October 15, 2007, or anytime prior to that date. The memorandum denotes that Ms. Bledsoe documented in her Florida Safe Families Network (FSFN)⁴ chronological notes for Case #2007-472139 that [REDACTED].

The OIG received information on November 27, 2007 that the mother, Child 1, and Child 2 relocated to Saline, LA. In an attempt to locate and interview Child 1 regarding this incident, the OIG Investigator used three separate phone numbers, each belonging to a [REDACTED] family member, on November 29, 2007, December 20, 2007, January 24, 2008, and February 6, 2008. It was not until the February 6, 2008 phone call that the OIG Investigator was able to arrange an appointment with Child 1 in order to obtain a sworn written statement. On February 8, 2008, the OIG commenced an investigation regarding falsification of official documentation by Ms. Bledsoe.

Allegation and Findings:

Allegation:

Circuit 1 Child Protective Investigator Lynette Bledsoe falsified Florida Safe Families Network (FSFN) chronological notes regarding a face-to-face visit with a Department customer regarding Case #2007-472139. If supported, the allegation would constitute a violation of 60L-36.005(1),(2),(3)(a)(1), and (2),(b),(c),(d), and (e), FAC; 60-5, 3-8.b.(2),(3),(5), and (6)(b), CFOP; and the referral to law enforcement to determine if the following statutes have been violated: § 838.022(1)(a),(2)(a) and (b) and (3) and §839.13(1), and (2)(a), and (c), F.S.

Findings:

Information obtained *supports* the allegation.

¹ A Quality Assurance Review is a tool utilized by the Department to ensure that investigators comply with Department standards.

² Ms. Bledsoe's employment with the Department was terminated effective January 4, 2008.

³ Ms. Haley was Ms. Bledsoe's immediate supervisor from August 22, 2007 through Ms. Bledsoe's termination from the Department.

⁴ The Florida Safe Families Network (FSFN) is Florida's federally funded Statewide Automated Child Welfare Information System that provides information to support multiple community-based organizations and Sheriff's offices, in partnership with the State of Florida, to identify victims of abuse and neglect.

Child 1 explained to the OIG Investigator that on October 15, 2007, she received a phone call from [REDACTED]⁵ (hereinafter referred to as the “father”) and was told that Ms. Bledsoe had been to her brother’s ([REDACTED]) home ([REDACTED])⁶ and requested to speak with Child 1. Child 1 stated that her father provided Ms. Bledsoe’s phone number and instructed her to contact Ms. Bledsoe. According to Child 1, she called the phone number provided on October 16, 2007 and left a voicemail message for Ms. Bledsoe. Child 1 stated she did not receive a return phone call. Child 1 indicated that she neither met nor spoke to Ms. Bledsoe on October 15, 2007, or at any other time.

CPIS Patricia Haley explained that on August 22, 2007, Ms. Bledsoe was assigned to her investigations unit and Ms. Bledsoe worked for her for a few months prior to her (Ms. Bledsoe’s) termination. According to Ms. Haley, during the time she supervised Ms. Bledsoe, she encountered problems with Ms. Bledsoe not submitting Risk Assessments on time, not keeping her case notes updated in FSFN, being unreachable, and taking customer case files to her home. Ms. Haley related that Ms. Bledsoe had been counseled in the past for the same issues.⁷

Ms. Haley stated that on October 29, 2007, Circuit 1 Operations Program Administrator (OPA) Pamela Anderson requested a QA on the 13 active investigations Ms. Bledsoe was conducting. During the review, case file⁸ #2007-472139 ([REDACTED]) was unable to be located. Ms. Haley explained that she contacted Ms. Bledsoe via phone and inquired as to the whereabouts of the case file and was informed by Ms. Bledsoe that the file was at her home. Upon Ms. Bledsoe returning the file on November 5, 2007, Ms. Haley said she questioned Ms. Bledsoe as to the lack of documentation in FSFN or in the case file. According to Ms. Haley, the file contained only a few handwritten notes and two short, non-descriptive FSFN chronological notes regarding face-to face visits with Child 1 and Child 2.

The OIG Investigator reviewed the following records:

Florida Safe Families Network Notes (FSFN)

Ms. Bledsoe documented on October 11, 2007 in her FSFN Chronological Note I.D. #100954957 that [REDACTED].

Ms. Bledsoe documented on October 23, 2007 in her FSFN chronological note I.D. #101134995 that [REDACTED].

⁵ [REDACTED]
⁶ [REDACTED]

⁷ On the following dates, counseling notices or performance reviews denoting poor performance were presented to and signed by Ms. Bledsoe: December 16, 2005, March 16, 2006, August 27, 2007, and December 20, 2007.
⁸ A case file is a folder containing original handwritten case notes regarding the investigation, Department required documentation, and court documents.

Timesheets and Travel Records

According to timesheet records reviewed for October 12, 2007 through October 18, 2007, Ms. Bledsoe documented that she worked seven regular hours on October 15, 2007. Ms. Bledsoe also documented that she worked eight regular work hours on October 10, 2007. Ms. Bledsoe did not submit a travel voucher or claim mileage for the month of October 2007.

Ms. Haley explained that based on the lack of information regarding the children's safety, she made contact with the mother, along with Child 1 and Child 2 at their residence ([REDACTED]) on November 5, 2007. While speaking with Child 1, Ms. Haley said that Child 1 stated that she did not meet Ms. Bledsoe on October 15, 2007 or on any other date. According to Ms. Haley, Child 2 confirmed that Ms. Bledsoe had conducted a face-to-face visit with her at [REDACTED] School on October 10, 2007 as was documented in FSFN chronological note I.D. #100954957.

Circuit 1 OPA Pamela Anderson stated that she has known Ms. Bledsoe since 1999, and was aware that she (Ms. Bledsoe) was having difficulty with work related issues. Ms. Anderson related that Ms. Bledsoe was counseled verbally on several occasions, but it became necessary for Ms. Anderson to officially document the ongoing performance problems due to lack of improvement on Ms. Bledsoe's part. Ms. Anderson explained that on October 29, 2007, she requested a QA review on all of Ms. Bledsoe's open investigations.

According to Ms. Anderson, Northwest Region CPI Specialist Tina Balbas conducted the review. Ms. Anderson explained that during the course of the review, Ms. Balbas discovered that the case file for investigation #2007-472139 ([REDACTED]) was missing from the office. Ms. Anderson said that CPIS Haley subsequently contacted Ms. Bledsoe and the file was located. Upon Ms. Haley reviewing the file, it was noted that Ms. Bledsoe only documented a brief handwritten note and two short, non-descriptive FSFN chronological notes regarding face-to-face visits with Child 1 and Child 2.

Ms. Anderson stated that due to the lack of documentation regarding the safety of the [REDACTED] children, Ms. Haley responded to the [REDACTED] residence ([REDACTED]) on November 5, 2007 and spoke with Child 1, Child 2, and the mother. Ms. Anderson explained that Ms. Haley related to her that Child 1 claimed to have never met Ms. Bledsoe. Ms. Anderson also stated that Ms. Bledsoe did conduct a face-to-face visit with Child 2 as per her FSFN chronological note #100954957. Upon Ms. Anderson questioning Ms. Bledsoe about the visit with Child 1, she denied falsifying FSFN chronological note #101134995 concerning the face-to-face visit with Child 1.

Ms. Anderson explained that based on Ms. Bledsoe's mishandling of the [REDACTED] investigation, along with a multitude of other administrative violations, Circuit Administrator Janice Thomas decided to terminate Ms. Bledsoe's employment based on poor performance. The Department subsequently notified Ms. Bledsoe via written correspondence on December 20, 2007 with a notice of intent to terminate.

Risk Assessment:

OPA Pamela Anderson verified that as of November 6, 2007, all children that were involved in the 13 open Department investigations being conducted by Ms. Bledsoe at the time of the review were seen by CPIS Haley or other CPs and determined to be safe.

Inspector General's Comments:

This investigation *supported* the allegation that Circuit 1 Child Protective Investigator Lynette Bledsoe falsified a child protective investigation record by creating an entry in FSFN indicating she conducted a face-to-face visit with a Department customer. According to witness testimony and documents reviewed during this investigation, it was determined that Ms. Bledsoe falsified chronological note #101134995 regarding protective investigation #2007-472139. It is recommended that the Northwest Regional Director ensure that Ms. Bledsoe's personnel file is annotated to reflect the findings of this investigation.

In accordance with § 20.055(6)(c), F.S., this investigation was coordinated with the Escambia County Sheriff's Office for investigation into possible criminal violations of §838.022(1)(a), (2)(a), and (b), and (3), F.S. (Official Misconduct) and §839.13(1), and (2)(a) and (c), F.S. (Falsifying Records). Ms. Bledsoe was not interviewed at this time, as there is reasonable belief that a criminal violation has occurred.

This investigation has been conducted in accordance with the ASSOCIATION OF INSPECTORS GENERAL Principles & Quality Standards for Investigations.

GOVERNING DIRECTIVES
Case Number: 2008-0017

I. *The Florida Statutes (F.S.) contain the following information in pertinent parts:*

838.022 Official misconduct.

- (1) It is unlawful for a public servant, with corrupt intent to obtain a benefit for any person or to cause harm to another, to:
 - (a) Falsify, or cause another person to falsify, any official record or official document;
 - (2) For the purposes of this section:
 - (a) The term "public servant" does not include a candidate who does not otherwise qualify as a public servant.
 - (b) An official record or official document includes only public records.
 - (3) Any person who violates this section commits a felony of the third degree, punishable as provided in § 775.082, § 775.083, or § 775.084.

839.13 Falsifying records.

(1) Except as provided in subsection (2), if any judge, justice, mayor, alderman, clerk, sheriff, coroner, or other public officer, or employee or agent of or contractor with a public agency, or any person whatsoever, shall steal, embezzle, alter, corruptly withdraw, falsify or avoid any record, process, charter, gift, grant, conveyance, or contract, or any paper filed in any judicial proceeding in any court of this state, or shall knowingly and willfully take off, discharge or conceal any issue, forfeited recognizance, or other forfeiture, or other paper above mentioned, or shall forge, deface, or falsify any document or instrument recorded, or filed in any court, or any registry, acknowledgment, or certificate, or shall fraudulently alter, deface, or falsify any minutes, documents, books, or any proceedings whatever of or belonging to any public office within this state; or if any person shall cause or procure any of the offenses aforesaid to be committed, or be in anywise concerned therein, the person so offending shall be guilty of a misdemeanor of the first degree, punishable as provided in § 775.082 or § 775.083.

(2)(a) Any person who knowingly falsifies, alters, destroys, defaces, overwrites, removes, or discards an official record relating to an individual in the care and custody of a state agency, which act has the potential to detrimentally affect the health, safety, or welfare of that individual, commits a felony of the third degree, punishable as provided in § 775.082, § 775.083, or § 775.084. For the purposes of this paragraph, the term "care and custody" includes, but is not limited to, a child abuse protective investigation, protective

supervision, foster care and related services, or a protective investigation or protective supervision of a vulnerable adult, as defined in chapter 39, chapter 409, or chapter 415.

(c) Any person who knowingly falsifies by altering, destroying, defacing, overwriting, removing, or discarding records of the Department of Children and Family Services or its contract provider with the intent to conceal a fact material to a child abuse protective investigation, protective supervision, foster care and related services, or a protective investigation or protective supervision of a vulnerable adult, as defined in chapter 39, chapter 409, or chapter 415, commits a felony of the third degree, punishable as provided in § 775.082, § 775.083, or

§ 775.084. Nothing in this paragraph prohibits prosecution for a violation of paragraph (a) or paragraph (b) involving records described in this paragraph.

II. *The Florida Administrative Code (F.A.C.) contains the following information in pertinent parts:*

60L-36.005 Disciplinary Standards.

(1) This rule sets forth the minimal standards of conduct that apply to all employees in the State Personnel System, violation of which may result in dismissal.

(2) Agencies within the State Personnel System perform a vast array of functions and deliver a wide variety of services. Some employees perform routine tasks in a safe office environment, while others engage in unpredictable life-threatening situations under the most demanding circumstances. Breach of a particular standard in one context might be less serious, while in another it might result in the loss of life or property. Accordingly, each agency shall have primary authority and responsibility for managing the conduct of its employees. If an agency deems it necessary to discipline an employee for violation of this rule, the agency may impose any discipline up to and including dismissal, taking into account the agency's unique mission and the individual facts and circumstances.

(3) Employees outside the permanent career service may be dismissed at will. Permanent career service employees may be suspended or dismissed only for cause, which shall include, but not be limited to, the following. Examples under the categories listed below are not exhaustive.

(a) Poor performance. Employees shall strive to perform at the highest level of efficiency and effectiveness; they shall do more than "just get by."

(1) Employees are expected to be reliable and dependable, for example: to show up for work, ready to work, on a reliable basis; to observe established work hours and scheduled appointments; to complete work on time; and to obtain permission before being off work and to schedule leave in a manner that minimizes work disruption.

(2) Employees are expected to be effective, for example: to organize their work; to stay focused on job related activities during work hours; to provide the level of effort

necessary to get the job done; to demonstrate willingness and ability to make decisions and exercise sound judgment; to produce work that consistently meets or exceeds expectations; to accept responsibility for their actions and decisions; to adapt to changes in work assignments, procedures, and technology; and to be committed to improving individual performance.

(b) Negligence. Employees shall exercise due care and reasonable diligence in the performance of job duties.

(c) Inefficiency or inability to perform assigned duties. Employees shall, at a minimum, be able to perform duties in a competent and adequate manner.

(d) Insubordination. Employees shall follow lawful orders and carry out the directives of persons with duly delegated authority. Employees shall resolve any differences with management in a constructive manner.

(e) Violation of law or agency rules. Employees shall abide by the law and applicable rules and policies and procedures, including those of the employing agency and the rules of the State Personnel System. All employees are subject to Part III of Chapter 112, Florida Statutes, governing standards of conduct, which agencies shall make available to employees. An agency may determine that an employee has violated the law even if the violation has not resulted in arrest or conviction. Employees shall abide by both the criminal law, for example, drug laws, and the civil law, for example, laws prohibiting sexual harassment and employment discrimination.

III. *Children and Families Operating Procedures (CFOP) contain the following information in pertinent parts:*

CFOP 60-5, Chapter 3, Standards of Conduct and Standards for Disciplinary Action for All Employees in the State Personnel System

3-8. Standards of Conduct. The following are the minimal Standards of Conduct that apply to all employees in the Department, violation of which may result in dismissal.

b. Permanent Career Service employees may be dismissed only for cause, which shall include, but not be limited to, the following. Examples under the categories listed below are not exhaustive:

(2) Negligence. Employees shall exercise due care and reasonable diligence in the performance of job duties.

(3) Inefficiency or inability to perform assigned duties. Employees shall, at a minimum, be able to perform duties in a competent and adequate manner.

(5) Violation of the Provisions of Law or Agency Rules. Employees shall abide by the law and applicable rules and policies and procedures, including those of the employing agency and the rules of the State Personnel System. All employees are subject to Part III of Chapter 112, Florida Statutes, governing standards of conduct, which the Department shall make available to employees. The Department may determine that an employee has violated the law even if the violation has not resulted in arrest or conviction. Employees shall abide by both the criminal laws, for example, drug laws, and the civil law, for example, laws prohibiting sexual harassment and employment discrimination.

(6) Conduct Unbecoming a Public Employee. Employees shall conduct themselves, on and off the job, in a manner that will not bring discredit or embarrassment to the state.

(b) Employees shall maintain high standards of honesty, integrity, and impartiality.