2026

City of Richmond Office of the Inspector General: Investigative Report

OIG CASE #: 25-0003-I

INSPECTOR GENERAL FOSTER CURTISS

CITY OF RICHMOND OIG | 900 E. Broad Street Suite 1500, Richmond, Virginia, 23219

Executive Summary

The City of Richmond (COR) Office of the Inspector General (OIG) initiated an investigation on July 10, 2024, after receiving information from the City Auditor's Office concerning an employee in violation of COR Administrative Policy § 21-7: Unauthorized Purchases. During an audit, excessive fuel charges were discovered pertaining to a single Parks and Recreation Department (PRD) vehicle card, made using the supervisor's PIN after work hours and on weekends. The investigation identified the subject as former temporary employee **George Hicks-Ward**, who had recently been fired from the PRD. The OIG investigated allegations that **Hicks-Ward** engaged in misconduct that resulted in abuse of authority, waste of government resources, and fraud against the COR, in violation of applicable City policies and state law.

- **The subject Hicks-Ward allegedly abused their authority, wasted government resources, and intentionally defrauded the COR using the COR fuel card and supervisor's PIN without proper authorization for personal gain.** The OIG reviewed security footage from City fueling locations, conducted formal interviews, and extensively reviewed all financial documents related to the vehicle fuel card and PIN used for purchases. The footage showed **Hicks-Ward** using the COR fuel card and entering his former supervisor's PIN after work hours, on weekends, and after his termination from the PRD. Based on the investigative findings, the OIG determined that the allegation that **Hicks-Ward** abused his authority by intentionally misusing resources owned by the COR is ***substantiated***.

Background

The City of Richmond (COR) Office of the Inspector General (OIG) initiated an investigation on July 10, 2024, after receiving information from the City Auditor's Office. During an audit, auditors discovered excessive fuel charges on a single Parks and Recreation Department (PRD) vehicle card, made using the supervisor's PIN after work hours and on weekends. The investigation identified the subject as former temporary employee **George Hicks-Ward**, who had recently been fired from the PRD.

The OIG Investigator obtained and reviewed video surveillance images from several Quarles gas stations and identified the individual in the videos and pictures as **Hicks-Ward**. **Hicks-Ward** was observed on 23 video images fueling various vehicles at the fueling station, then filling up his personal vehicle using the COR-assigned fuel card for a specific PRD vehicle to which he previously had access, as well as his former supervisor's PIN.

The OIG worked in collaboration with the Richmond Police Department (RPD). **Hicks-Ward** declined to be interviewed by RPD and OIG.

The PRD identified 239 unauthorized transactions in the fiscal years 2023 to 2024 totaling $15,737.24, in which the purchase occurred after 5:00 p.m. (after work hours) and on weekends.

Because these transactions occurred beyond Quarles' security footage retention time, not all videos and pinhole images were available for review.

Hicks-Ward was indicted for one count of Credit Card Theft, one count of Credit Card Forgery, one count of Identity Fraud, and four counts of Credit Card Fraud**. Hicks-Ward** has since pleaded guilty to one count of Credit Card Fraud, one count of Credit Card Theft, and one count of Identity Fraud, and has been ordered to pay restitution to the COR for the transactions that occurred during the period of May 1st, 2024, through June 5, 2024, in which he was observed in kiosk images at the gas pumps, totaling $2,949.52.

Observations

The investigation identified vulnerabilities in fuel card and PIN management practices, particularly regarding employees and supervisors sharing assigned PINs with other personnel, including temporary staff. According to DPW Standard Operating Procedure FL 060, Fuel Card PIN Management, Usage, and Tracking, all fuel cards are the property of the COR or its fuel vendor and are restricted from personal use by any employee or non-employee. The procedure requires authorization from a fuel card custodian, operations manager, or high authority prior to issuing a PIN. Additionally, the Fleet Fuel Management Analyst Associate and the Fuel Card Custodian are responsible for ensuring that each recipient of a fuel PIN signs a mandatory Fuel Card/PIN User Agreement, which is retained by the requesting department.

The investigation found opportunities to strengthen adherence to these procedures. Increased oversight of fuel card distribution, PIN issuance, and usage are recommended to ensure compliance and accountability. All materials are now secured behind a locked lot gate, with additional security methods in place to restrict and monitor access. Supervision has increased oversight of both materials and vehicle keys to ensure proper control and accountability. The PRD has already begun implementing corrective actions to improve controls in this area.

Allegations and Findings

Allegation (COR/OIG): A report or claim of potential fraud, waste, or abuse involving the **COR**. Allegations may be **received** by **OIG** from the public, the COR employees, contractors, or other sources, or **initiated** by **OIG** through proactive reviews.

Classification after OIG inquiry/investigation:

- **Substantiated:** Evidence meets the applicable standard of proof (e.g., **preponderance of the evidence**) and indicates the alleged conduct likely occurred.
- **Unsubstantiated:** Evidence does **not** meet that standard. This classification does **not** state the claim is false; it reflects insufficient evidence to prove it.

Note: "Preponderance of the evidence" means **more likely than not**. If OIG policy uses additional outcomes (e.g., **partially substantiated**, **inconclusive**), those may be applied as appropriate.

Virginia Code Policy § 15.2-2511 defines fraud as the intentional deception by an individual or organization, internal or external to local government, that may result in a tangible or intangible benefit or cause detriment to others or the locality. The statute further states that fraud includes false representation by words or conduct, false or misleading statements, or the concealment of information that should have been disclosed, when such actions are intended to deceive.

The investigation determined that **Hicks-Ward** intentionally deceived the City to obtain unauthorized fuel at the City's expense. This conduct resulted in a personal benefit and constituted the deliberate misuse of COR funds, meeting the statutory definition of fraud. Based on the findings, OIG concludes that **Hicks-Ward** engaged in misconduct that resulted in abuse of authority, waste of government resources, and fraud against the COR, in violation of applicable City policies and state law.

OIG determined the allegation to be ***substantiated***.

Foster Curtiss

Foster Curtiss, Inspector General