Citizen Hotline Protocols
Revised November 2021

In 2007, the Legislature established the Citizen Hotline Program in the Office of the State Auditor. Senate Bill 5513 (codified at RCW 43.09.186) gives citizens a way to "recommend measures to improve efficiency in state and local governments and to report waste, inefficiency, or abuse, as well as examples of efficiency or outstanding achievement by state and local agencies, public employees, or persons under contract with state and local agencies."

The Office of the State Auditor values the role of the people in promoting accountability, fiscal integrity and openness in state and local government. The Office also strives to ensure the efficient and effective use of public resources; therefore not every submission will result in an examination by our Office.

Unless waived by the citizen, the law requires the names of those contacting the Hotline, as well as any documentation be kept **CONFIDENTIAL** until submissions are closed. The submissions must remain open until the audit is complete. If the submission is anonymous, it can be closed before the audit has been completed. When closed, the public records laws apply to all documentation pertaining to the hotline.

Please contact the Hotline Coordinator if you have questions on the following protocols for the Citizen Hotline process.

Hotline Submissions

All citizen submissions are logged into the Hotline database. Each hotline is assigned an individual referral number to allow for central tracking and monitoring. Intake of citizen submissions can occur the following ways:

- Website – Citizen submission(s) will automatically populate the database.
- Letter/mail – The Hotline Coordinator will input information into the database.
- Phone – Caller to the toll-free line will get a voice message requesting that he or she leave information or provide information using the above methods. The Hotline Coordinator will oversee the input of the information into the database.
- Audit Team – Audit Managers should complete the intake form on the SAO Website to ensure the submission is entered into the database.

Initial Assessment Process

- Hotlines submitted by or referencing a legislative member or Governor's Office will be sent to the Director of Legislative and Policy Affairs, Deputy State Auditors and Director/Assistant Director assigned to that audit client.
- Hotlines submitted by a member of the media will be forwarded to the Director of Communications and Assistant Director assigned to that audit client.
- The Hotline Administrator will determine one of the following courses of action:
  - No Action. If a hotline submission is received that is vulgar, profane, or grossly disrespectful, no action is required (Note: this is a high standard and should be applied conservatively).
  - Refer the submission to the applicable state or local audit client only after the Audit Manager or designee contacts the constituent who submitted the hotline to ensure the citizen is ok with their concern being turned over to our audit client.
  - Audit team *considers* in next audit; however, incorporating the issue into the audit is not required if other areas of higher risk are considered a priority. If you decide to not review a citizen submission, please have a discussion with your Assistant Director. The audit team should contact the constituent who submitted the hotline informing them of the decision, then follow up with the citizen as appropriate.

Use the template letters in the attachment as a starting point for responding to the constituent:

- In litigation
- Considered in planning but not selected due to other risks identified.
- Land-use issues
- Beyond our Authority
- Criminal Activity

If in doubt, contact your Assistant Director for guidance.

- Audit team examines the concern immediately. Audit team contacts the constituent who submitted the hotline informing them of the decision, then follows up when the examination is completed. If a hotline is actually a fraud or a Whistleblower concern, it needs to be closed out of the hotline database and put in the appropriate database for that concern. Contact the Hotline Administrator for guidance.

Follow-up Expectations

- All submissions (with an exception for anonymous submissions) require a response by an individual on the team assigned within five working days of the hotline assignment to that team. Teams can respond by phone, email or formally in a letter. The team must update the activity log with details of the conversation with the citizen, or attach a copy of the written correspondence to the Hotline database.
- Please speak with the Director of Legislative and Policy Affairs and your Assistant Director before proceeding with any action in regards to hotlines involving legislative members or Governor's Office.
- No open hotline will go more than 4 months without a follow-up contact made to the person who submitted it.
- The Hotline Administrator will send weekly follow up emails to the individual responsible to contact the citizen, until a response is sent.

Response Guidelines:

For the initial response to the constituent, the auditor should include the following:

1) Acknowledgement and appreciation for the submission.
2) Timeline of when follow-up work will be completed, and if or when they will be hearing from the Auditor's Office again.
3) Contact name and number in case the citizen has questions or additional information to provide.
4) If a citizen is requiring additional time, regroup with your Assistant Director and if necessary the Director of Legal Affairs.

If you have safety concerns when responding to or addressing citizen concerns please contact your Assistant Director to discuss a planned response.

A record of constituent contact, including verbal, should be documented with the date and included in the "Supporting Documents" tab and/or the Activity log.

Reporting Results

The results of hotline submissions require timely reporting to the citizen who submitted the hotline, the concerned entity, and other stakeholders as appropriate. Audit Managers should determine the appropriate method of reporting based on the ability to timely report the results and the significance of the issue. Audit Managers should attach the final reporting to the hotline submission in the database under the "Supporting Documents" tab and that all fields in the database are complete.

If after completing the hotline submission review it is decided that directly contacting (i.e. phone call or meeting with them) the citizen to discuss their submission(s) would be more timely, effective or efficient, document that in the "Activity Log" section for that hotline. This can replace sending a closure letter explaining the results of the submission.

The final reporting method for hotline submissions should be included in the audit areas in the Accountability report in the current audit. If we perform a hotline review between audits, include the review of the citizen concern in the audit areas in the next regularly scheduled audit. At conclusion of our hotline review, outreach to the citizen is required regardless of reporting level.

Hotline Related Work

Billing – Audit teams should charge submission review to the client's audit budget using the project code "CITZ" to enable SAO to track all time examining citizen submissions.

Workpapers – Audit Teams should document hotline examinations in TeamMate using steps located in the TeamStore (under Special Engagements | Citizen Hotline). Audit Managers should approve workpapers prior to releasing final letters. Document hotline work in a separate folder, or it can be included in other planned work so long as it is documented in the audit plan where hotline work is being performed.

Management of Hotline Submissions

Audit Managers should review the submission available in the hotline database for their team and notify the Hotline Administrator of any database information that needs updating.

Phone Conferences – Quarterly, the appropriate Director or Assistant Director and the Hotline Administrator will conduct phone conferences with the Audit Managers to discuss the status of outstanding hotline submissions as needed.

Closing a Hotline Submission:

Before closing a hotline, the Audit Manager should review the hotline submission to ensure all proper boxes are filled out on the Referral Information tab before sending it to the Hotline Administrator to close, including but not limited to the Client, Description, Category, and Reporting Type. This is necessary to ensure proper information is stored for our annual report, and is a vital step in the process.

[DATE]

[NAME]
[ADDRESS]
[CITY]

Dear NAME:

Thank you for contacting the Office of the Washington State Auditor with your concerns.

You told us [INSERT AS VERBATIM AS YOU DEEM NECESSARY]. After discussing this with you further, we understand your concern this way: [CATEGORY OF CONCERN, OR MORE PLAIN-TALKED RESTATEMENT TO MAKE CLEAR TO A COLD READER WHAT WE LOOKED AT]

We take our job of holding government accountable for the use of public resources seriously, and we have carefully considered the information you shared in your hotline submission. We have determined this issue is outside our audit authority as defined by RCW 43.09. This appears to be a legal matter that is best handled by the court system. You may wish to consider resolving your concerns in this way.

We are sorry we could not assist you with your concern.

Sincerely,

[NAME]
[TITLE]

[HOTLINE NUMBER]

NOTE: This template is to be used when responding to citizen hotline letters <u>concerning matters in litigation</u>.

[DATE]

[NAME]
[ADDRESS]
[CITY]

Dear NAME:

Thank you for contacting the State Auditor's Office Citizen Hotline with your concerns regarding [GOVERNMENT/ENTITY]. [CITIZEN CONCERN—Summarize/restate citizen concern in our own words: "In your referral, you expressed concern that …"]

We take our job of holding government accountable for the use of public resources seriously, and we have carefully considered the information you shared in your hotline procedures and the analysis we performed during planning, we decided not to select this matter for further testing. We now consider this item closed. If you have additional concerns in the future, please enter a new report through our online referral system.

Sincerely,

[NAME]

[HOTLINE NUMBER]

NOTE: This template is to be used when responding to citizen hotline letters <u>concerning matters we have considered but did not select for audit</u>.

[DATE]

[NAME]
[ADDRESS]
[CITY]

Dear NAME:

Thank you for your contacting the State Auditor's Office Citizen Hotline regarding a land [use/sale] concern. We take our job of holding government accountable for the use of public resources seriously, and we have carefully considered the information you shared in your hotline submission.

We have determined this issue is outside our audit authority as defined by RCW 43.09. Therefore, we consider this matter closed.

Sincerely,

[NAME]
[TITLE]

[HOTLINE NUMBER]

NOTE: This template is to be used when responding to citizen hotline letters concerning matters in Land Use.

[DATE]

[NAME]
[ADDRESS]
[CITY]

Dear Name:

Thank you for contacting the State Auditor's Office Citizen Hotline regarding [Government/Entity]. [CITIZEN CONCERN—Summarize/restate citizen concern in our own words if necessary: "In your referral, you expressed concern that …"].

We take our job of holding government accountable for the use of public resources seriously, and we have carefully considered the information you shared in your hotline submission. We have determined this issue is outside our audit authority as defined by RCW 43.09. Therefore, we consider this matter closed. However, you may wish to contact the [AGENCY] because [INSERT WHY WE THINK THIS]:

[AGENCY CONTACT]

Sincerely,

[NAME]

[HOTLINE NUMBER]

NOTE: This template is to be used when responding to citizen hotline letters <u>concerning matters beyond our audit authority</u>.

[DATE]

[NAME]
[ADDRESS]
[CITY]

Dear NAME:

Thank you for contacting the State Auditor's Office Citizen Hotline. In the referral you submitted on [DATE], you asked this Office to investigate your allegations of [RESTATE ALLEGATIONS].

Please be advised that our Office does not have the authority to investigate allegations of racketeering or organized criminal activities (there may be other criminal activities to describe) is outside our audit authority as defined by RCW 43.09. Therefore, we cannot open an investigation. We suggest that you call your law enforcement agency to discuss this concern.

Sincerely,

[NAME]
[TITLE]

[HOTLINE NUMBER]

NOTE: This template is to be used when responding to citizen hotline letters <u>concerning matters with criminal actions</u>.