

OFFICE OF INSPECTOR GENERAL

School District of Philadelphia

Investigative Report Synopsis

Introduction

The Office of Inspector General (OIG) for the School District of Philadelphia (District) investigated the personal use of a District vehicle by a District employee. The OIG substantiated that the employee used their District vehicle for personal purposes during work hours, after work, and on one occasion a District holiday.

Applicable Policies

Vehicle Usage

School Board Policy 711 addresses “Use of School District Vehicles.” That policy and its Attachment, “Non-Bus Vehicle Usage Policies and Procedures,” describes the goal of the policy, in part, as “enhance[ing] accountability for vehicle usage” to “promote the uniform, efficient, safe and ethical use of the District’s fleet.” Transportation, under supervision from the Chief Operating Officer, is responsible for “enforc[ing] adherence to fleet operational procedures[.]” According to the policy, employees who are “found to have violated the policies set forth in this Directive may be subject to disciplinary action up to and including termination.”

Policy 711 requires that District vehicles “are to be used only for the performance of job-related duties and responsibilities and for no other reason except for commuting to employment site.” Section 3.4 of the Attachment states that “[d]epartments are responsible for take home vehicle assignments subject to the approval of both the department head and the General Manager of Transportation Services.” The policy is clear that take home vehicle privileges can be used only between the employee’s permanent primary residence and work location.

Section 9.2 of the Attachment states “[e]mployees should have no expectation of privacy for their physical location while operating a District vehicle. The District has the right to use GPS systems to monitor activity including but not limited to: excessive idling, excessive speeding, unauthorized trips, unauthorized stops, unauthorized weekend usage and any other improper usage of District vehicle.”

Section 6.1 of the Attachment reiterates that “District vehicles [are] for official use only. District employees are directed to avoid any vehicle use that might result in or create the appearance of impropriety with regard to public perception concerning the misuse of District vehicles. Employees may not use District vehicles while off duty except for work-related activities designated by their department head.”

REPORT FRAUD, WASTE, AND ABUSE

PHONE: 215-400-4030

EMAIL: INSPECTORGENERAL@PHILASD.ORG

WEBSITE: philasd.org/inspectorgeneral

THIS PUBLIC SYNOPSIS HAS BEEN REDACTED AND EDITED FOR CONFIDENTIALITY. A MORE COMPREHENSIVE REPORT OF INVESTIGATION WAS SUBMITTED TO THE BOARD OF EDUCATION, SUPERINTENDENT, AND OTHER APPROPRIATE DISTRICT SUPERVISORS.

OIG Investigation

The OIG for the District received a complaint from a private citizen that was forwarded from the City of Philadelphia Office of Inspector General (City OIG) on September 29, 2021. The complaint alleged that an employee was seen parking their municipal vehicle and entering a bar in Philadelphia sometime between 3:00 p.m. and 4:00 p.m. on September 28, 2021. The complainant also reported the municipal tag number of the vehicle. Included with the complaint was video of the vehicle and an individual entering the bar. Based on the tag number, the City OIG determined that it was a District-owned vehicle and reported the complaint to the OIG. Review of District records showed the vehicle was assigned to a District employee.

As a result, the OIG attempted to review the employee's vehicle travel using VEONow, the District's third-party vehicle GPS tracking service. However, the GPS device in the vehicle was not working on September 28, 2021, and had not been active for months. The District's Office of Transportation (Transportation) was contacted, and they requested the employee bring the vehicle into the garage to repair the GPS, which the employee eventually did. The GPS was fixed in early November 2021. Immediately after the GPS was operational, on November 4, 2021, the vehicle was driven to a medical facility and remained there for over an hour. The medical facility is approximately 26 miles from the District's main office, and travel time is approximately 50 minutes. Furthermore, the facility is 13.5 miles from the employee's residence, which they had to pass on the way from the District to the medical facility.

From November 2021 through May 2022, the same trip to the medical facility was made 13 additional times. All of these trips occurred between noon and 3:00 p.m. The employee's normal work hours were 7:00 a.m. to 3:00 p.m. No leave was requested for any of these dates. The employee stated that their supervisor was aware of these appointments.

The employee's supervisor confirmed that the employee would notify them when they had a doctor's appointment and that leave time was not required if the appointment was at the end of the employee's shift. However, the supervisor was unaware that the employee used the District vehicle to travel to their medical appointments and was unaware of the location of the medical facility.

The OIG further reviewed the daily travel for the vehicle. The employee's District vehicle made eleven trips to bars or social clubs from November 2021 through June 2022, one of which occurred on a District holiday. All of these trips to various bars were after the employee's regular work hours, and the trips were not for District business. The vehicle was active on Martin Luther King (MLK) Day, January 17, 2022, despite that day being a District holiday. The vehicle first traveled to a grocery store, then to a bar where it remained for 45 minutes. The employee's supervisor confirmed that the employee was on-call on MLK Day, but nothing occurred which required the employee to come into the District or perform any work on that day.

REPORT FRAUD, WASTE, AND ABUSE

PHONE: 215-400-4030 EMAIL: INSPECTORGENERAL@PHILASD.ORG WEBSITE: philasd.org/inspectorgeneral
THIS PUBLIC SYNOPSIS HAS BEEN REDACTED AND EDITED FOR CONFIDENTIALITY. A MORE COMPREHENSIVE REPORT OF INVESTIGATION WAS SUBMITTED TO THE BOARD OF EDUCATION, SUPERINTENDENT, AND OTHER APPROPRIATE DISTRICT SUPERVISORS.

In an interview with the OIG, the employee candidly admitted to their personal use of the vehicle. They stated that they would frequent various bars to get food and socialize, but would not drink and drive. One of the bars was a very close distance from the employee's home as well as a family member's residence. The employee stated they often would get food at the bar with their family after work. The employee explained that they visited other locations in the District vehicle to meet friends and socialize.

The employee told investigators that they honestly did not think about the poor perception of parking the District vehicle outside of a bar after work hours. Despite stating that they were unaware of the vehicle usage manual, the employee signed an "All-Call Verification Form" in April 2022. On the form, the employee verified that they "under[stood] that, as a driver of the vehicle, [they were] aware of standard policy and procedure for non-bus usage."

Conclusions and Recommendations

The OIG recommended discipline consistent with District policy for the employee's misuse of a District vehicle.

As stated in previous OIG reports, the District must strengthen compliance with the non-bus vehicle policies and procedures. District employees must be made explicitly aware of the usage limitations for their assigned District vehicle and for any pool vehicle they may request. The District exposes itself to increased liability risks when individuals continue using District vehicles outside the parameters of the vehicle policy. The District needs to clearly define what constitutes "personal travel" per the vehicle usage policy to avoid uncertainty and incorporate that definition into the vehicle use authorization forms so that any driver is made explicitly aware of the limitations on District vehicle usage.

REPORT FRAUD, WASTE, AND ABUSE

PHONE: 215-400-4030 EMAIL: INSPECTORGENERAL@PHILASD.ORG WEBSITE: philasd.org/inspectorgeneral
THIS PUBLIC SYNOPSIS HAS BEEN REDACTED AND EDITED FOR CONFIDENTIALITY. A MORE COMPREHENSIVE REPORT OF INVESTIGATION WAS SUBMITTED TO THE BOARD OF EDUCATION, SUPERINTENDENT, AND OTHER APPROPRIATE DISTRICT SUPERVISORS.