

**HIG Program Review:
Equal Opportunity Program**

Executive Summary

In late 2005, the Office of Equal Opportunity and Minority Health was transferred to the Office the Inspector General (HIG) by action of the former Secretary of Health. The actual transition, including relocation of staff, did not occur until February 2006. This program review was undertaken to provide information useful to the merger process and for improvements in processes and operations where indicated. Also, key to a successful merger will be the equal opportunity technical knowledge offered by central office and county level staff.

The methodology utilized included review of relevant documents such as policy, statutes, records of the 2005 EEO Committee, key informant interviews, and on-line surveys of field staff and leadership.

Results from the on-line surveys reflect the perceptions and knowledge base of field staff and leadership. A majority of coordinators reported not having been trained in required duties, nor receiving written descriptions of those duties. Twenty-seven percent (27%) of coordinators indicated they do not know who/what office is currently responsible for conducting investigations in their jurisdictions and the majority reported they have not been trained in conducting investigations. A portion of coordinators and leaders indicated they conduct investigations with no involvement of, or coordination with the Tallahassee EO Office.

Most leaders (86%) expressed complete confidence in their coordinators to conduct thorough and unbiased investigations. Approximately two-thirds of leaders (68%) expressed confidence in the ability of Tallahassee EO Office to conduct thorough and unbiased investigations. Over one-half of leaders (60%) indicated they are not kept adequately apprised of investigation status, and slightly over one-third (36%) expressed concerns about the thoroughness and objectivity of investigative reports. The majority of leaders (83%) reported Tallahassee EO staff to be professional and courteous. Some leaders (37%) expressed concerns about timeliness and 44% expressed concerns about responsiveness and usefulness of information provided by staff.

Among EEO coordinator respondents, those who reported a longer length of service, cover multiple counties and/or devote a significant amount of time to EEO duties, were more likely to express dissatisfaction with services provided by the Tallahassee EO Office. Seventy-eight percent (78%) of coordinators reported they have never felt pressure from management to reach certain conclusions when dealing with EEO complaints, while 22% reported they have felt some level of pressure. Those reporting a longer length of service and/or those covering multiple counties were more likely to report having experienced pressure from management to reach certain conclusions.

This report also includes an exploration of investigative and mediation process issues such as the potential for conflict of interest between the roles of investigator and

mediator, when those roles are assumed by the same staff and/or office, at different points in time within the same case. A related issue involves the potential liability incurred by the department when an investigation is abandoned due to the resignation or termination of the alleged discriminatory official.

From this information, combined with a summary of the 2005 EEO Committee activities and recommendations, key areas emerge where opportunities exist. Actions recommended from the results of this program review include:

- Implement improved, cost and time-efficient mechanisms of providing initial and regularly recurring EO training to all department employees and supervisors.
- Clearly delineate the complaint intake and investigatory processes whereby the roles of field and central office staff are clearly defined, effectively communicated and staff is properly trained to perform those roles.
- Clearly define and distinguish between those who investigate and those who are authorized to mediate for the department as well as for determining thresholds for pursuing mediation, discontinuing investigations and/or resuming investigations. This distinction may be facilitated by organizational restructuring to further separate the investigatory and mediation functions.
- Conduct a detailed review of requirements for compliance data collection with the aim of reducing redundant data collection and providing standardized data element definitions and sources.
- Customer service should be the driving principle behind program changes and future operations. This will require the continuous awareness of and responsiveness to the unique needs of the various customer groups including complainants, alleged discriminatory officials, supervisors/administrators, department senior leadership, all non-supervisory employees, and clients of the department and the department's contractors.

Workplans are in place and activity is underway to operationalize these recommendations. This will not be a short-term endeavor, but can be expected to require a long-term strategic focus, with the need for support from executive leadership. While this review was limited to identifying opportunities in the equal opportunity program, it is expected that the merger of offices, staff, and missions, has the potential for improvements in HIG operations as well. Crucial to success of this undertaking will be infusion of the equal opportunity-related technical knowledge offered by existing program staff, at both central office and the county level.