

AUDITOR'S REPORT

VOUCHER INFORMATION PROCESSING SYSTEM (VIPS) IMPLEMENTATION



July 8, 2016

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July 8, 2016

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RE: ViPS Implementation

The Audit Services Department performed procedures relative to the Voucher Information Processing System Implementation. The objective of the engagement was to determine whether acceptance testing by Central Technology Services (CTS), County Criminal Courts at Law, and the Administrative Office of District Courts (DCA) provides assurance that ViPS is properly implemented. Our procedures included the following:

1. Examining the adequacy of the project plan and determining if it included the following:
 - A formal project management methodology.
 - Problem logging and/or error tracking and resolutions.
 - Application change testing.
 - User acceptance testing and approvals.
 - System stress testing documentation.
2. Selectively evaluating whether any data transfers to ViPS for the system implementation were completed successfully, with the results supported by appropriate documentation.
3. Selectively examining system configuration documentation to verify that:
 - ViPS updates and replaces essential functions of the Attorney Claims Module.
 - ViPS verifies claims against court case information in the Justice Information Management System (JIMS).
 - ViPS has the ability to restrict access of users to the correct modules and functions as required.
 - Transaction history from initial submission of claims to final payment is logged.
4. Selectively examining the completed departmental acceptance testing to evaluate whether selected essential functions of ViPS were adequately tested before being placed into production. Essential functions include, but are not limited to the following:

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- Appropriate forms/vouchers are used and submitted/signed by the authorized list of “appointed” and “contract” attorneys.
 - Fees/hourly rates are accurately calculated and supported, and do not exceed the maximum hours and/or amount.
 - Forms/vouchers are approved by the appropriate parties.
5. Determining if policies and procedures have been updated to reflect changes in the process due to the implementation of ViPS and if changes have been communicated to appropriate parties.

The engagement process included providing you with engagement and scope letters and conducting an entrance and exit conference with your personnel. The purpose of the letters and conferences were to explain the process, identify areas of concern, describe the procedures to be performed, discuss issues identified during the engagement, and solicit suggestions for resolving the issues. A draft report was provided to you and your personnel for review.

The work performed required our staff to exercise judgment in completing the scope objectives. As the procedures were not a detailed inspection of all transactions, there is a risk that error or fraud was not detected during this engagement. The official, therefore, retains the responsibility for the accuracy and completeness of their financial records and ensuring sufficient controls are in place to detect and prevent fraud.

The enclosed Auditor’s Report presents the significant issues identified during our procedures, recommendations developed in conjunction with your staff, and any actions you have taken to implement the recommendations.

We appreciate the time and attention provided by you and your staff during this engagement.

Sincerely,



Barbara J. Schott
County Auditor

cc: District Judges
County Judge Ed Emmett
Commissioners:
R. Jack Cagle
Jack Morman
Steve Radack
Gene Locke
Devon Anderson
Vince Ryan
William J. Jackson

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OVERVIEW

The Sixth Amendment of the U.S. Constitution provides a defendant with the right to legal counsel for his or her defense in a criminal proceeding. The United States Supreme Court ruled that counsel must be provided to indigent defendants in felony cases, which places the cost for legal counsel on the government in instances where the defendant is unable to afford legal representation. Further, the Fair Defense Act was enacted in 2001 and required all courts in Texas to adopt formal procedures for providing appointed lawyers to indigent defendants. The Act also established the Task Force on Indigent Defense to oversee indigent defense services in Texas, currently known as the Texas Indigent Defense Commission (TIDC).

The Administrative Office of the District Courts administers all District Court divisions. The Office of Court Management administers the County Criminal Courts at Law. In order to provide defense services for those eligible under the above legislation, Harris County has “assigned” and “contract” attorneys. The attorneys may receive multiple payments for one case whether or not their case is disposed.

Texas House Bill 1318 (H.B. 1318), relating to the appointment of counsel to represent certain youths and indigent defendants, was signed by the governor on June 14, 2013. Among other requirements, the amended law requires each county to submit to the TIDC its indigent defense plans, the plans of operation for the creation of a public defender’s office or managed assigned counsel program, as well as certain information reported to the county by attorneys. The law also requires the county to submit to the Commission annually information that describes for the preceding fiscal year the number of appointments made to each attorney accepting appointments in the county, beginning November 1, 2014.

To comply with the reporting requirements of H.B. 1318, Harris County secured a grant to help fund the development of a new Voucher Information Processing System application. The ViPS project sought to not only enhance government transparency, but to automate the processes of attorney voucher submittal, court and County Auditor approval, initiating and tracking attorney payments, as well as produce management data to the TIDC, courts, and the County Auditor. The development and implementation of ViPS included:

- Automating online attorney fee voucher preparation and workflow between Harris County departments.
- Integrating data between existing Harris County systems, JIMS and the County’s Financial Records (IFAS).
- Integrating the attorney certification profile data with IFAS for enhanced claims validation.
- Making key IFAS data available to allow for improved and consolidated management reporting to Judges.
- Replacing the existing custom Attorney Claims Module which the County Auditor uses for claims’ data entry.

- Extending the Fair Defense Act Management System in use today by District Courts to the County Criminal Courts, providing online attorney profile maintenance, and consolidated availability calendaring and appointment rotation automation.

ViPS was implemented for all 37 District and County Criminal Courts on October 1, 2015. The District Juvenile Courts are expected to implement ViPS at a future date.

RESULTS

Based on procedures performed, ViPS was implemented using an adequate project plan. No data transfers were necessary for this project. Policies and procedures have been updated to reflect changes in the process due to the implementation of ViPS and have been communicated to appropriate parties. In addition, ViPS:

- Updates and replaces essential functions of the Attorney Claims Module.
- Verifies claims against court case information in JIMS.
- Has the ability to restrict access of users to the correct modules and functions.
- Logs transaction history from initial submission of claims to final payment.

However, our procedures did identify some opportunities for improvement as noted below:

- Ensuring that a unique user identifier is captured for each action that occurs on a particular voucher.
- Developing and implementing a formal user access policy which includes documented requests for all actions pertaining to user access to the ViPS application.

These matters are discussed in more detail in the following Issues and Recommendations section of the report.

ISSUES AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Subject	Background	Issue	Recommendation	Management Response
Voucher History (Transaction) Log	Application-level audit logs, often referred to as an audit trail, enable management to identify the transactions and events they record by tracking transactions from their source to their output and by tracing backward. The audit trails should capture, among other things, user identification, types of events, date and time, origination of event, and actions such as reading, editing, and deleting records or fields.	<p>The transaction log does not consistently capture a unique user identifier of the individual performing the current action on a particular voucher. Not capturing unique user identifiers for each action results in a loss of accountability should the need to trace transactions or events occur.</p> <p>The ability to identify users provides management with a proactive approach to identify potential training needs and the ability to detect potential inappropriate activity.</p>	District and County Court Management should work with CTS to find a resolution, if cost-effective, so that ViPS appropriately captures a unique user identifier for each action that occurs on a particular voucher and formalize their approach for utilizing the transaction log to monitor voucher activity by documenting frequency of review and responsible party.	The transaction log issue was in relation to history tables and in no way impacted the main Voucher records in production. At the time of implementation, ViPS had a Transaction Log (History tables) that tracked changes made to the Voucher. This transaction log contained two different fields to capture the person that initiated the change. This proved to be confusing since it was difficult to determine which field truly reflected the person making the change. ViPS was updated on April 7th 2016 which consolidated the two separate fields into one field. This one field now accurately reflects the User that made the change to the Voucher. The history tables are in use today by CTS to research problem areas, and requirements are being formed to make more use of this resource for possible

ISSUES AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Subject	Background	Issue	Recommendation	Management Response
(Continued) Voucher History (Transaction) Log				inclusion into the Administrative interface.
Access to ViPS	Best practice guidance "IT Audit and Assurance Standards," issued by Information System Audit and Control Association (ISACA), states that one of the access administration tools includes having formally documented access requests for all actions (e.g., additions, deletions, resets, and profiles changes) with adequate rationales and management approval. Per the "ViPS Access Approval Policy," only designated Harris County users have access to the "Administrative ViPS" application through requests made to the ViPS Project Manager.	There are no formal written policies and procedures governing granting and removing access to the Administrative ViPS application for departmental users. As a result, users who are added subsequent to the implementation may not be granted appropriate access levels with proper approvals. Without a formal documented access request, there is minimal assurance that user access levels are granted in accordance with their job duties and business needs or that their access is appropriately authorized.	DCA Management should develop and implement a formal user access policy which includes documented requests for all actions pertaining to user access to the ViPS application. In addition, periodic monitoring should be performed in order to ensure that user access is still applicable.	A formal policy for access control to 'Administrative ViPS' was put in place Jan 2016 after the system went live Oct 2015. CTS are working on providing a security manager feature to facilitate administration. The Product Owner will initiate a security audit of existing Auditor and Court Management users and formalize/establish the documented process once the security manager becomes available.