



Response to Internal Audit Report

Judge Renata D. Turner, Chief Judge
Cicely Barber, Chief Administrative Officer

Juvenile Court wants to extend our sincere gratitude to the County's internal audit team for their invaluable assistance and professionalism throughout the audit process. Your thorough evaluation has highlighted key areas for improvement, enabling us to enhance our operational efficiency and financial management practices within the Juvenile Court. We appreciate your insights and recommendations, which will guide us in refining our processes and ensuring the highest accountability and service delivery standards.

Response to Audit Finding #1: Lack of Segregation of Duties

We acknowledge the audit finding regarding the lack of adequate segregation of duties within the Juvenile Court Accounting Office, as detailed in the internal audit report covering the period from January 1 to December 31, 2023.

Juvenile Court recognizes the importance of adequate segregation of duties as a fundamental internal control mechanism to mitigate the risks of errors, fraud, and inefficiencies in financial operations. We understand that when a single individual is responsible for multiple financial tasks—such as collecting payments, recording receipts, preparing deposits, issuing disbursements, and reconciling accounts—there is an increased risk of inaccurate financial reporting and operational inefficiency.

Actions Taken:

1. **Hiring of Additional Staff:** As noted in the audit, limited staffing in our Accounting Office was the primary cause for this issue. We have since addressed this by hiring additional staff, including a Court Accountant and an experienced Court Accountant Manager, to bolster our accounting team. This will allow us to distribute accounting responsibilities more effectively and mitigate the risks associated with the lack of segregation of duties.
2. **Task Reallocation:** With the new personnel, we have reallocated key duties related to collections, recording, disbursements, and reconciliations. No single employee now has control over all aspects of the financial process, in accordance with best practices for internal controls.
3. **Implementation of Compensating Controls:** In instances where full segregation of duties is not immediately feasible, we have implemented enhanced compensating controls, including increased oversight and monitoring. Supervisory reviews of reconciliations, transaction approvals, and audit trails have been established to safeguard financial processes further. Additionally, random audits of cash handling and financial reporting will be conducted to ensure compliance and operational efficiency.

Ongoing Commitment: Juvenile Court remains committed to maintaining a robust internal control environment. We will continue to assess our staffing needs and workflow processes to ensure appropriate task distribution and oversight. Furthermore, we will monitor these internal controls to ensure they remain effective, efficient, and aligned with best practices.

We believe the steps taken have sufficiently addressed the concerns outlined in Finding #1, and we will continue to refine our processes as necessary to ensure sound financial management.

Response to Audit Finding #2: Failure to Review Invoices

We acknowledge the audit finding regarding the failure to thoroughly review invoices during the payment process, as identified in the internal audit for the period from January 1 to December 31, 2023.

Juvenile Court is committed to maintaining accuracy and integrity in its financial processes, including reviewing and validating vendor invoices. We understand that errors in invoice processing—such as incorrect case numbers, inaccurate service dates, missing signatures, and incomplete supporting documentation—can lead to issues with payment verification, unauthorized charges, and delayed or inaccurate financial reporting.

Actions Taken:

1. **Revised Invoice Review Process with DocuSign:** To address the findings, we have strengthened our invoice review procedures and implemented DocuSign for documenting and routing invoices. DocuSign now ensures that each invoice is electronically reviewed and approved at multiple levels:
 - The designated recipient, Court Accountant, and Court Accountant Manager review and approve the invoices before submission to the Chief Administrative Officer for final approval.
 - DocuSign tracks the review process, ensuring that all necessary approvals are recorded, and the required supporting documentation is attached before the invoice is submitted for payment.
 - Once all approvals are completed in Juvenile Court, the fully approved invoice is sent directly to Finance for payment, streamlining the process and reducing the potential for errors.
2. **Training and Accountability:** Staff involved in the invoice review and approval process have received additional training to ensure familiarity with DocuSign and the revised review protocols. This training emphasizes the importance of validating critical details, such as case numbers and service dates before invoices are approved.
3. **Improved Documentation and Review Procedures:** The adoption of DocuSign has enhanced our internal controls by:
 - Automatically capturing the signature of each approver, ensuring a clear audit trail.
 - Providing real-time tracking of the approval process, reducing the likelihood of missing documentation or signatures.
 - Ensuring compliance with our policies and procedures through built-in checkpoints at each stage of the review process.
4. **Technological Enhancements and Future Improvements:** In addition to the DocuSign implementation, we are exploring further technological solutions to automate aspects of invoice management. These enhancements will reduce manual entry errors and ensure greater accuracy in financial reporting.

Ongoing Commitment: Juvenile Court is committed to maintaining robust internal controls and ensuring the accuracy of all invoices and payment vouchers. With the implementation of DocuSign, we have improved the efficiency, transparency, and accountability of our invoice

review process. We will continue to monitor these processes to ensure consistent compliance with our internal control policies.

Response to Audit Finding #3: Untimely Payment of Invoices

We acknowledge the audit finding related to untimely payments of invoices, particularly Translation Station for interpreter services, as identified in the internal audit for the period from January 1 to December 31, 2023.

Juvenile Court recognizes the importance of timely payment for services rendered to maintain strong vendor relationships and ensure accurate financial reporting. We also understand that delays in the approval and payment process, such as those noted during the audit, can lead to operational inefficiencies, potential late fees, and inaccurate financial documentation.

Actions Taken:

1. **Policy Update and Formalization of Contract:** Juvenile Court has updated its policies and procedures regarding the timely payment of all invoices, including interpreter services.
2. **Automation of the Invoice Process:** To address the delays caused by manual handling and the lack of tracking systems, Juvenile Court has implemented DocuSign to automate the documentation, routing, and approval of invoices. This system will:
 - Reduce the time it takes to receive, approve, and process invoices by allowing real-time tracking of each invoice through the approval stages.
 - Ensure that invoices are processed and routed automatically from the Clerk's Office to the Accounting & Finance Division, minimizing the potential for delays due to manual handling or missed communication.
3. **Tracking System for Invoice Processing:** We have introduced an internal tracking system to log the receipt and approval of all invoices. This system ensures that:
 - All invoices are documented upon receipt, providing clear visibility into the payment status.
 - Delays in processing are identified early, allowing us to take corrective action before invoices become overdue.
 - Services rendered are verified promptly, reducing the likelihood of further delays in the payment cycle.
4. **Strengthening Communication Between Departments:** We have improved communication protocols among the departments involved in the invoicing process. Identifying the departmental staff responsible for managing and maintaining the task while promoting an understanding of other departments' challenges helps align everyone towards the same goal between the Court Clerk, Court Administration, and the Accounting and Finance Division.

Ongoing Commitment: Juvenile Court is committed to improving the efficiency of our payment processes and ensuring that all invoices are paid within the designated timeframe. Integrating automated processes and enhanced tracking systems will significantly reduce delays and improve communication among departments. We will continue to monitor the timeliness of payments to prevent future delays and maintain strong relationships with our vendors.

Response to Audit Finding #4: Manual Accounting Processes

We acknowledge the audit finding concerning the manual accounting processes used by Juvenile Court and recognize the need to modernize our practices to improve operational efficiency, reduce errors, and ensure compliance with relevant financial and legal requirements.

Juvenile Court has taken several steps to address the concerns raised in the audit regarding the manual processes for cash reporting, receipting, and payment remittance, as well as the handling of unclaimed property.

Actions Taken:

1. Automation of Financial Processes:

- **Cash Receipting:** We are actively exploring technological solutions to automate cash receipting and reporting functions. This will streamline the process for customers at the payment window and improve the accuracy and transparency of our financial records.
- **Reduction of Manual Receipts:** To address the issue of handwritten receipts not being captured in JCATS, we are working to phase out the use of manual receipts altogether. The goal is to transition to an integrated case management system where payments are processed, tracked, and receipted electronically in real-time. This will allow faster service at the payment window while ensuring that each transaction is appropriately recorded and credited to the correct account.

2. Improving Operational Efficiency:

- We are conducting a comprehensive review of all manual accounting processes to identify additional opportunities for automation. This includes automating repetitive tasks like cash reporting, payment remittance, and bank reconciliations. We are exploring partnership opportunities with other County vendors already working with other courts to secure the necessary technology to implement these changes. JCATS cannot meet the insufficiencies identified in the audit findings.
- In the interim, we have established enhanced monitoring and review procedures to mitigate the risks associated with manual processes, including increasing oversight and cross-checking by the Court Accountant Manager.

3. Training and Policy Updates:

- We have updated internal policies to reflect these new processes and are conducting training for relevant staff members to ensure proper understanding and implementation.
- Additionally, we are working closely with Fulton County's Finance Department to align our practices with countywide financial management standards and automation and coordinating with other Fulton County Justice Partners to identify case management system functionality to meet our needs.

Ongoing Commitment: Juvenile Court is committed to continuous improvement in financial operations. Our efforts to automate manual processes will improve our operational efficiency and enhance our internal controls and compliance with applicable laws. We will continue to assess our

processes and identify ways to incorporate available technologies to reduce the likelihood of errors and improve the quality of our financial reporting.

Response to Audit Finding #5: Failure to Comply with State Regulated Escheatment Process

We acknowledge the audit finding related to the failure to comply with the State of Georgia's escheatment process and the need for improved procedures in addressing unclaimed or outstanding checks. Juvenile Court recognizes the importance of adhering to state laws and ensuring that unclaimed property is appropriately managed in accordance with the "Disposition of Unclaimed Property Act" (O.C.G.A. § 44-12-190).

Actions Taken:

1. Development of an Escheatment Process:

- **Establishment of Procedures:** Juvenile Court has implemented a formal escheatment process to ensure full compliance with the State of Georgia's regulations. This process addresses the timely reporting and remitting of unclaimed property, such as uncashed checks, to the Georgia Crime Victims Emergency Fund or Georgia Department of Revenue after the required dormancy period.
- **Bank Reconciliation Reviews:** We have implemented monthly bank reconciliation reviews to identify outstanding or uncashed checks that meet the dormancy period for escheatment. These reviews ensure that any unclaimed property is identified and addressed promptly, reducing the risk of non-compliance with state regulations.

2. Reporting and Remittance of Outstanding Checks:

- During a review of outstanding checks from 2017 to the present, we found unclaimed restitution payments totaling \$1,752.75. These funds, with a list of victims and businesses, have been sent to the Georgia Crime Victims Emergency Fund. We identified only one check eligible for escheatment, but it will not be eligible until 2025. To ensure compliance with the State of Georgia's escheatment and unclaimed restitution laws, Juvenile Court has established a regular schedule for sending unclaimed checks that meet the criteria.
- **Proper Documentation:** Juvenile Court also developed a system to ensure that all unclaimed or outstanding checks are properly documented and tracked throughout the process. This documentation serves as an audit trail, confirming that the court has complied with all legal requirements for unclaimed property.

3. Monthly Review and Monitoring: Juvenile Court has implemented a new policy for monthly review of all unclaimed and outstanding checks to prevent future occurrences. This policy includes a detailed checklist to ensure that all checks meeting the dormancy threshold are promptly reported to the Georgia Crime Victims Emergency Fund or Georgia Department of Revenue. This regular monitoring process will help the court remain compliant with state escheatment laws and avoid potential penalties or interest.

4. Training and Accountability: As part of the implementation of the escheatment process, key personnel in the Accounting and Finance divisions have undergone training to ensure they fully understand state requirements and the steps necessary to comply with escheatment laws. Additionally, a system of accountability has been put in place to track the handling of unclaimed property and ensure that all actions are properly documented.

Ongoing Commitment: Juvenile Court is committed to improving financial management practices and ensuring compliance with all state regulations. We will continue to review and update our procedures to ensure that any unclaimed property is appropriately managed in accordance with the law. Furthermore, regular audits and reviews of the escheatment process will be conducted to ensure continued adherence to state requirements.

Response to Audit Finding #6: Inadequate Notice of Hearing Cancellations

We acknowledge the audit finding related to the inadequate notice of hearing cancellations and recognize the need for a more streamlined communication process to prevent unnecessary billing from vendors for services not rendered. Juvenile Court is committed to improving our internal procedures to ensure timely and effective notice of hearing cancellations to all relevant parties, including vendors providing translation services.

Actions Taken:

1. Improved Communication Process for Cancellations:

- **Establishment of a Notification Protocol:** Juvenile Court has developed and implemented a formalized process to ensure timely communication of hearing cancellations. We have created a protocol requiring that any hearing cancellations are immediately communicated to the Clerk's Office and all relevant service providers, including translation vendors, at least 48 hours before the scheduled hearing or as soon as possible. This process ensures that vendors receive timely notice to avoid unnecessary billing for services not provided.
- **Coordination Between Judicial Case Managers and Clerk's Office:** We have enhanced communication between the Clerk's Office and Judicial Case Managers, who maintain court calendars, and the Translation Station service providers.

2. Vendor Notification Tracking:

- We have implemented a tracking system to document when hearing cancellations are communicated to vendors. This system ensures that cancellations are properly documented and provides a clear audit trail for future reference.
- The Clerk's Office now sends written confirmation of cancellations to translation service providers to confirm receipt of the notice within the vendor's required timeframe.

3. Staff Training: To ensure compliance with the new process, Juvenile Court has provided staff training on the revised cancellation procedures. This training emphasizes the importance of timely communication and outlines the steps to prevent unnecessary vendor billing. Moreover, Court Administration has explained the financial implications of not timely canceling translation services.

Ongoing Commitment: Juvenile Court remains committed to ensuring the efficient use of resources and reducing unnecessary costs. We believe the new notification protocol and tracking system will significantly improve the timeliness of hearing cancellations and prevent future occurrences of unnecessary vendor billing. We will continue to monitor the effectiveness of these measures and adjust as needed to ensure continued compliance and efficiency.

Response to Audit Concern 1: Inability to Accept Credit Cards

We acknowledge the audit finding concerning the inability of Juvenile Court to accept credit or debit card payments. Offering multiple payment options, including credit and debit cards, is critical for improving customer service, enhancing convenience, and promoting efficient cash management practices.

Actions Taken:

1. **Implementation of Credit Card Payments via Catalis:** Juvenile Court is in the final stages of implementing a credit card payment system through Catalis, a platform designed to process secure, electronic payments. This new system will allow us to accept credit and debit card payments in person and online. The implementation of Catalis is anticipated to greatly enhance customer convenience, improve cash flow, and reduce the need for manual handling of cash payments, which can introduce risk.
2. **Enhanced Payment Options for the Public:** Once fully operational, this system will provide customers more flexibility in payment methods, addressing the limitation of only accepting cash or money orders. This expanded payment capability is in line with financial management best practices and will allow the court to meet the needs of the public more effectively.
3. **Improved Cash Handling and Security:** By reducing the amount of cash handling in the Court's Accounting Division, we aim to mitigate the risk of manual errors, theft, and other security concerns. Accepting credit card payments will contribute to safer cash management practices and improve overall efficiency in processing payments.

Ongoing Commitment: Juvenile Court is committed to adopting modern financial practices that support efficient operations and deliver better customer service. We will continue to explore opportunities for enhancing our payment systems and maintaining strong internal controls to ensure fiscal integrity.

Response to Audit Concern 2: Dual Receipt System

We acknowledge the audit's concern regarding the dual receipt system used in the Juvenile Court Accounting office. The use of both a manual receipt book and the JCATS system for recording payments and issuing receipts has raised concerns about potential confusion and financial mismanagement.

Actions Taken:

1. **Implementation of a Single Receipt System:**
 - o Juvenile Court is reviewing and standardizing its payment receipt system to ensure that all financial transactions are accurately recorded in one system. The dual receipt process was originally implemented to reduce wait times for customers; however, we recognize that it can lead to potential discrepancies in financial reporting and customer confusion.

- Moving forward, all payments received will be directly recorded into JCATS, and only a system-generated receipt will be issued. This will ensure that each transaction is accurately linked to the corresponding court order, improving accountability and transparency in our financial operations.
- 2. **Enhanced Customer Communication:** To ensure a smooth transition to a single receipt system, clear communication will be provided to customers explaining the updated process. We will emphasize that the system-generated receipt is the only receipt necessary and that it is fully linked to their court transaction.
- 3. **Improved Financial Tracking and Accountability:** By eliminating the manual receipt process and standardizing on a single system, we aim to reduce the risk of misappropriation of funds, improve revenue tracking, and ensure greater accuracy in our financial reporting. This change will also strengthen internal controls and streamline Juvenile Court accounting operations.

Ongoing Commitment: Juvenile Court remains committed to ensuring accurate financial tracking and transparency. We will continue to monitor and refine our processes to maintain the highest standards of financial integrity and customer service, including exploring more efficient case management systems.

Response to Audit Concern 3: Lack of a Financial System in JCATS

We acknowledge the audit's findings regarding the limitations of the JCATS system in capturing all financial activities related to Juvenile Court cases. Currently, financial records are maintained in QuickBooks, separate from case management in JCATS, which presents challenges in ensuring accurate and efficient financial tracking.

Actions Taken:

1. **Exploring Integrated Case and Financial Management Solutions:** Juvenile Court has recognized the limitations of the current system, JCATS, where financial data is managed separately from case information. We have initiated a preliminary review of the Enterprise Justice case management system (formerly Odyssey) by Tyler Technologies, which is already used by other justice partners in Fulton County. Enterprise Justice offers an integrated financial component that allows the Court to capture, record, and report financial activities directly within the case management system.
2. **Migration to Enterprise Justice:**
 - As Fulton County already holds an enterprise license for the Enterprise Justice system, a transition for Juvenile Court would focus primarily on data migration. Integrating case and financial management data would streamline operations, enhance financial reporting, reduce manual data entry, and increase overall efficiency.
 - Additionally, Enterprise Justice supports credit card payments, addressing concern #1 regarding payment options and allowing for more convenient, secure financial transactions.
3. **Strengthened Cybersecurity:** Additionally, migration to the Enterprise Justice system would centralize all Fulton County court cases and financial data under one vendor,

offering improved cybersecurity protections. This will mitigate the risks associated with managing financial data across multiple systems and enhance the security of sensitive information.

Ongoing Commitment: Juvenile Court remains committed to implementing technology solutions that support accurate financial management and reporting. Accordingly, Juvenile Court recommends moving to the Tyler Enterprise Justice case management system. See Exhibit A for additional advantages.

Exhibit A

One of the audit recommendations was to transition to a new case management system. Our current system, JCATS, has proven antiquated and inadequate in meeting our court's needs. Juvenile Court recommends moving to Tyler Technologies' Enterprise Justice case management system, which is already used by all other Fulton County courts, including Superior, State, Probate, and Magistrate Courts.

This recommendation comes with several key advantages that will not only address the gaps identified in our audit report but also provide long-term benefits to the County:

1. Seamless Integration and Cost-Efficiency

Fulton County already holds an enterprise license for Tyler Technologies' system. As Juvenile Court would be the last court to migrate, our costs will be limited to data migration, system implementation, and training. It is important to note that we would leverage the County's existing enterprise infrastructure, eliminating the need to purchase new licenses. This reduces the financial burden significantly compared to adopting a completely new system and aligns us with other courts.

2. Increased Security and Risk Reduction

Earlier this year, the County experienced a severe cyber-attack, revealing vulnerabilities in our technological infrastructure. Transitioning Juvenile Court to Tyler's Enterprise Justice system would reduce security risks by consolidating our systems under one vendor. With all courts using a unified system, we can implement stronger, coordinated cybersecurity measures and benefit from more robust and efficient technical support. Tyler Technologies has demonstrated its ability to provide secure and reliable solutions for the County, and moving to this system would mitigate the security risks associated with our outdated JCATS system.

3. Improved Case Management and Functionality

JCATS, while functional in some respects, is essentially a database rather than a comprehensive case management system. It is outdated and has stalled critical court processes such as e-filing. E-filing is a priority for Juvenile Court, but the promised functionality of JCATS has not met the requirements, leaving us severely behind other courts our size. In contrast, Tyler's Enterprise Justice system has been proven to support e-filing and offers modern, user-friendly interfaces that enhance the efficiency and accuracy of court operations. Tyler's system is currently used by the other courts in the County, which further underscores its reliability.

4. Long-Term Cost Savings and Operational Efficiency

The long-term savings and operational benefits are substantial. JCATS is an antiquated system with growing maintenance costs and inefficiencies, which will continue to incur additional expenses over time. By moving to Tyler's system, we will streamline workflows, improve data accuracy, and reduce time spent on manual processes, ultimately lowering operational costs. Additionally, having one vendor for all court systems will reduce the overall costs associated with managing multiple case management systems and vendors.

5. Positioning Fulton County as a Leader in the State

Fulton County has long been regarded as a leader in Georgia's judicial system. By transitioning Juvenile Court to Tyler's Enterprise Justice system, we will set an example for other large, independent juvenile courts across Georgia. Many of these courts currently use JCATS, which, like ours, is failing to meet their evolving needs. By adopting Tyler's system, we expect other courts to follow our lead, allowing for potential collaborative opportunities and ensuring uniformity across juvenile courts throughout the state. Fulton County has the chance to demonstrate its commitment to innovation, security, and operational excellence through this transition.

6. Alignment with Audit Recommendations

The recommendation to replace our current case management system with a more functional, modern alternative is a direct result of the internal audit findings.

Conclusion

Transitioning Juvenile Court to Tyler Technologies' Enterprise Justice case management system is a crucial step toward modernizing our court operations, improving security, and reducing long-term costs. This system will ensure that our court is well-equipped to handle the complexities of the future and maintain its position as a leader in the state's judicial landscape.