



INVESTIGATIVE REPORT

David Cook, Inspector General

OFFICE: DEPARTMENT OF CHILD SERVICES (DCS)
TITLE: DCS FORMER EMPLOYEE CRIMINAL ACTIVITY
CASE ID: 2023-05-0183
DATE: May 15, 2024

Inspector General David Cook, after an investigation by Inspector General Special Agent Jason Fajt, reports as follows:

The Indiana General Assembly charged the Indiana Office of Inspector General (OIG) with addressing fraud, waste, abuse and wrongdoing in the executive branch agencies of state government. Ind. Code §4-2-7-2(b). The OIG also investigates allegations of criminal activity and Code of Ethics violations by state workers. Ind. Code §4-2-7-3. The OIG may recommend policies and carry out other activities designed to deter, detect and eradicate fraud, waste, abuse, mismanagement and misconduct in state government. Ind. Code §4-2-7-3(2).

I. Complaint

On May 18, 2023, the OIG received a complaint alleging that a former Indiana Department of Child Services (DCS) Family Case Manager (FCM), Parker Salinas (Salinas), engaged in falsification of records regarding child welfare visits in DCS's Case Management Database, Management Gateway for Indiana's Kids (MaGIK). According to the complaint, DCS had conducted a preliminary investigation that revealed discrepancies in the MaGIK system for six of Salinas' assigned cases.

II. Background

Salinas began working for DCS as an FCM in May of 2022. As an FCM, Salinas' duties included assessing allegations of abuse and neglect; referring clients to appropriate services;

preparing court reports and social histories; advocating for families and children; testifying in court; de-escalating potentially volatile situations; and collaborating with law enforcement, schools, medical personal, mental health agencies, the courts and providers to promote the best outcomes for children.

According to DCS policy, new FCMs go through cohort training and direct supervision for approximately six months before being able to work independently. Once the FCM begins independently performing their job duties, they report their interactions, contacts and pictures in MaGIK to support their findings and recommendations.

DCS has an internal policy that FCMs should strive for a case assessment rate of 90%. Throughout much of his time with DCS, Salinas was below this target rate. When DCS began a competition to engage its employees to complete more assessments, Salinas increased his assessment rate, reporting that he had completed 100% of his assessments.

According to DCS, at the same time that Salinas reported his 100% completion rate, DCS received an educational neglect report for one of the children assigned to him. Salinas had claimed that he contacted the child at school, but the school stated that the child had several unexcused absences and that the child was not at school the day Salinas claimed to have visited.

As a result of these discrepancies, DCS began investigating Salinas' reports. Upon cross-referencing Salinas' documentation, phone records, school records and text messages, DCS found six potential instances of false reporting.

As a result of their findings, DCS terminated Salinas on May 3, 2023.

III. OIG Investigation

OIG Special Agent Fajt investigated the allegations. As part of his investigation, Special Agent Fajt interviewed Salinas' direct supervisor and the DCS Howard County Local Office

Director (LOD). The LOD explained DCS's investigation and provided Special Agent Fajt with Salinas' state-issued phone.

When Special Agent Fajt interviewed Salinas' DCS supervisor, he learned about the process to begin independently working as an FCM. He also learned that when Salinas' cases were reassigned upon his dismissal, the new FCMs reported that Salinas had made no family contact, contradicting Salinas' documentation in MaGIK. As a result of this interview, Special Agent Fajt requested and received Salinas' assessment records for September 2023, the first month DCS allowed Salinas to work on his own; January 2023, the midpoint of his employment; and the assessments related to DCS's investigation of March 2023, April 2023 and May 2023. After reviewing Salinas' MaGIK entries, Special Agent Fajt identified twenty-one potential cases of false reporting.

Special Agent Fajt contacted and interviewed approximately thirty witnesses involved in the twenty-one potential cases of false reporting. In addition to Salinas' supervisor and the Howard County LOD, Special Agent Fajt interviewed family members of DCS cases to which Salinas was assigned and school administrators where the children on his cases went to school.

When Special Agent Fajt interviewed family members and showed them a picture of Salinas, many claimed they had never seen him before. Others stated that they were not available during the times Salinas claimed to have interviewed them; that they conducted the interviews over the phone rather than in person, submitting pictures to Salinas via text; or that their quoted statements contained within the MaGIK record were not accurate. Many family members provided Special Agent Fajt with text messages and phone records to substantiate their claims.

School administrators provided Special Agent Fajt with records of school visitations and reviewed security camera footage. On at least two occasions, the records revealed that Salinas did not conduct a visit with a child as he reported in MaGIK.

For example, in one case DCS received an allegation from a child that her father had threatened her with a deadly weapon. DCS assigned Salinas to investigate and report on the child's safety. On May 1, 2023, Salinas created a post-dated entry in MaGIK claiming to have met with the child at school and the parents at their residence on March 23, 2023. When Special Agent Fajt interviewed the parents, however, they stated that Salinas did not contact them for a meeting until May 1, 2023. The parents provided text message exchanges with Salinas, which were dated May 1, 2023. Similarly, the school's sign in logs did not list Salinas as having visited the school March 23, 2023, and the picture Salinas uploaded to MaGIK to support his school visit was taken on his state-issued phone on May 1st.

In addition to interviewing witnesses, Special Agent Fajt provided Salinas' state-issued phone to a Forensics Analyst with the Secret Service. The Secret Service analyzed the data stored within the phone and created forensic reports that allowed Special Agent Fajt to review call logs and text messages to cross-reference Salinas' claims of contact with families. From the phone records, Special Agent Fajt found instances where Salinas did not contact families on his cases at the times he claimed and instances that he requested that the families send pictures for his reports via text instead of taking the pictures himself. It is important for FCMs to visit families in person to establish safety, accurately understand the child's situation in order to effectively and truthfully testify and provide de-escalation services in the event there is a volatile situation. The LOD stated that Salinas' conduct was in clear violation of DCS's code of conduct.

Special Agent Fajt attempted to contact Salinas several times, but Salinas did not reply to Special Agent Fajt's attempts.

IV. Conclusion

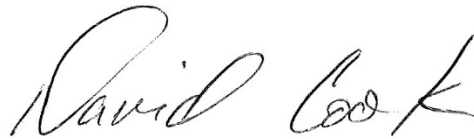
Special Agent Fajt found credible evidence to substantiate allegations that Salinas falsified DCS records in at least nine cases, in violation of Ind. Code §35-33-22-2, a Class A Misdemeanor, and engaged in Official Misconduct in violation of Ind. Code §35-44.1-1-1, a Level 6 Felony.

The OIG submitted the results of the investigation to the Howard County Prosecutor's Office on February 12, 2024, who charged Salinas with one count of Official Misconduct and nine counts of Falsifying Child Abuse or Neglect Information or Records. The OIG acknowledges criminal charges are merely allegations, and individuals are considered innocent until proven guilty.

Accordingly, this investigation is closed.

Dated: May 15, 2024

APPROVED BY:

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "David Cook". The signature is written in black ink and is positioned above a horizontal line.

David Cook, Inspector General