

COMPLIANCE AUDIT

Prothonotary
Bucks County, Pennsylvania
For the Period
January 1, 2017 to December 31, 2020

November 2021



Commonwealth of Pennsylvania
Department of the Auditor General

Timothy L. DeFoor • Auditor General



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**TIMOTHY L. DEFOOR
AUDITOR GENERAL**

The Honorable C. Daniel Hassell
Secretary
Pennsylvania Department of Revenue
Harrisburg, PA 17128

We have conducted a compliance audit of the Prothonotary, Bucks County, Pennsylvania (County Officer), for the period January 1, 2017 to December 31, 2020, pursuant to the requirements of Sections 401(b) and 401(d) of *The Fiscal Code*, 72 P.S. § 401(b) and § 401(d).

The objective of the audit was to determine whether all moneys collected on behalf of the Commonwealth have been correctly assessed, reported, and promptly remitted and to provide a report to the Department of Revenue to allow the Department of Revenue to state and settle the County Officer's account. Our audit was limited to areas related to the objective identified above and was not conducted, nor was it required to be, in accordance with Government Auditing Standards issued by the Comptroller General of the United States.

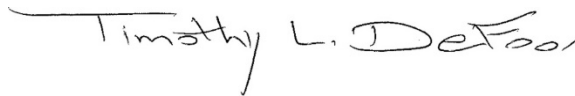
The County Officer is responsible for establishing and maintaining effective internal controls to provide reasonable assurance of compliance with state laws and regulations applicable to the collection of moneys on behalf of the Commonwealth, including whether they have been correctly assessed, reported, and promptly remitted. The County Officer is also responsible for complying with those laws and regulations. It is our responsibility to perform procedures to obtain sufficient, appropriate evidence to the extent necessary to satisfy the audit objective. We believe that our audit provides a reasonable basis for our conclusions.

Based on our audit procedures, we conclude that, for the period January 1, 2017 to December 31, 2020, the County Officer, in all significant respects, complied with state laws and regulations applicable to the collection of moneys on behalf of the Commonwealth, including whether they have been correctly assessed, reported, and promptly remitted.

This report includes a summary of the County Officer's receipts and disbursements of funds collected on behalf of the Commonwealth (summary). We obtained data representing the County Officer's receipts and disbursements from the Pennsylvania Department of Revenue and Administrative Office of the Pennsylvania Courts, which obtains data from each of the Commonwealth's prothonotary offices, and used the data to create the summary in the format required by the Department of Revenue. We also evaluated the accuracy of the data as part of our audit to conclude on the County Officer's compliance with certain state laws and regulations as described in the previous paragraph. Any adjustments that we considered necessary based on our audit work are disclosed in the *Audit Adjustments* line of the summary; however, the scope of our audit does not include the issuance of an opinion on the accuracy of the amounts reported in the summary.

The purpose of this report is to determine whether all moneys collected on behalf of the Commonwealth have been correctly assessed, reported, and promptly remitted. This report is not suitable for any other purposes.

The contents of this report were discussed with the management of the County Officer. We appreciate the courtesy extended by the Prothonotary, Bucks County, to us during the course of our audit. If you have any questions, please feel free to contact the Bureau of County Audits at 717-787-1363.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Timothy L. DeFoor". The signature is written in a cursive style with a long horizontal line extending to the left of the first letter.

October 19, 2021

Timothy L. DeFoor
Auditor General

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PROTHONOTARY
BUCKS COUNTY
BACKGROUND
FOR THE PERIOD
JANUARY 1, 2017 TO DECEMBER 31, 2020

The Department of Auditor General is mandated by Article IV, Section 401(b) and (d) of *The Fiscal Code* (Act of April 9, 1929, P.L.343, No. 176), to audit the accounts of each county officer to determine whether all moneys collected on behalf of the Commonwealth have been correctly assessed, reported and promptly remitted.

Receipts consist of monies collected on behalf of the Department of Revenue and the Administrative Office of Pennsylvania Courts. These include monies collected for the following taxes, surcharges, fees, and fines:

- Writ Taxes of \$.50 or \$.25 imposed on taxable instruments filed with the Prothonotary.
- Divorce Complaint Surcharges of \$10 imposed on all divorce decrees.
- Judicial Computer System/Access To Justice Fees of \$35.50 imposed on all petitions for grant of letters, and first filings in petitions concerning adoptions, incompetents' estates, minors' estates, and inter vivos trusts. Effective October 30, 2017, Act 40 and Act 44 increased the fee to \$40.25.
- Protection From Abuse Surcharges of \$100 imposed against defendants when a protection order is granted as a result of a hearing. Protection From Abuse Contempt Fines of not less than \$300 nor more than \$1,000 imposed against a defendant who is found to be in violation of a protection from abuse order.
- Criminal Charge Information System Fees imposed on all custody cases. Of the fee imposed, 80% is payable to the Administrative Office of Pennsylvania Courts (AOPC) and 20% is payable to the County in which the action took place. The summary of receipts and disbursements only reflects the portion collected on behalf of the AOPC.

PROTHONOTARY
BUCKS COUNTY
BACKGROUND
FOR THE PERIOD
JANUARY 1, 2017 TO DECEMBER 31, 2020

Total disbursements are comprised as follows:

Prothonotary checks issued to:

Department of Revenue	\$ 1,484,594
Administrative Office of Pennsylvania Courts	<u>23,344</u>
Total	<u><u>\$ 1,507,938</u></u>

This balance reflects a summary of monthly transmittal reports as settled by the Department of Revenue. The balance also reflects a summary of receipts disbursed directly to the Administrative Office of Pennsylvania Courts.

Patricia Bachtle served as Prothonotary during the period January 1, 2017 to January 1, 2018.

Judith Reiss served as Prothonotary during the period January 2, 2018 to December 31, 2020.

The summary of receipts and disbursements provides a summary of receipts and disbursements by category. The categories and the amounts of taxes, surcharges, fines, and fees assessed are based on Pennsylvania laws and regulations.

The summary was prepared in accordance with reporting requirements prescribed by the Pennsylvania Department of Revenue. Under this method, only the Commonwealth portion of cash receipts and disbursements are presented, revenues are recognized when received, and expenditures are recognized when paid.

PROTHONOTARY
BUCKS COUNTY
SUMMARY OF RECEIPTS AND DISBURSEMENT
FOR THE PERIOD
JANUARY 1, 2017 TO 2020

Receipts:

Writ Taxes	\$ 17,840
Divorce Complaint Surcharges	50,590
Judicial Computer System/Access To Justice Fees	1,416,350
Protection From Abuse Surcharges and Contempt Fines	350
Criminal Charge Information System Fees	<u>23,344</u>
Total Receipts	1,508,474
Commissions	<u>(536)</u>
Net Receipts	1,507,938
Disbursements to Commonwealth	<u>(1,507,938)</u>
Balance due Commonwealth (County) per settled reports	-
Audit Adjustments	-
Adjusted balance due Commonwealth (County) for the period January 1, 2017 to December 31, 2020	<u><u>\$ -</u></u>

PROTHONOTARY
BUCKS COUNTY
SUMMARY OF PRIOR AUDIT RECOMMENDATION
FOR THE PERIOD
JANUARY 1, 2017 TO DECEMBER 31, 2020

Summary Of Prior Audit Recommendation

During our prior audit, we recommended that the office:

- Establish and implement an adequate system of internal controls over e-filing receipts.

During our current audit, we noted that the office complied with our recommendation.

PROTHONOTARY
BUCKS COUNTY
REPORT DISTRIBUTION
FOR THE PERIOD
JANUARY 1, 2017 TO DECEMBER 31, 2020

This report was initially distributed to:

The Honorable C. Daniel Hassell
Secretary
Pennsylvania Department of Revenue

The Honorable H. Geoffrey Moulton, Jr.
Court Administrator of Pennsylvania
Supreme Court of Pennsylvania
Administrative Office of Pennsylvania Courts

The Honorable Judith Reiss
Prothonotary

The Honorable Neale Dougherty
Controller

The Honorable Diane M. Ellis-Marseglia
Chairperson of the Board of Commissioners

This report is a matter of public record and is available online at www.PaAuditor.gov. Media questions about the report can be directed to the Pennsylvania Department of the Auditor General, Office of Communications, 229 Finance Building, Harrisburg, PA 17120; via email to: news@PaAuditor.gov.