

# ATTESTATION ENGAGEMENT

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## Prothonotary Northampton County, Pennsylvania For the Period January 1, 2016 to December 31, 2019

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August 2020



Commonwealth of Pennsylvania  
Department of the Auditor General

Eugene A. DePasquale • Auditor General



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EUGENE A. DePASQUALE  
AUDITOR GENERAL

### Independent Auditor's Report

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

We have examined the accompanying statement of receipts and disbursements (Statement) of the Prothonotary, Northampton County, Pennsylvania (County Officer), for the period January 1, 2016 to December 31, 2019, pursuant to the requirements of Sections 401(b) and 401(d) of *The Fiscal Code*, 72 P.S. § 401(b) and § 401(d). The county office's management is responsible for presenting this Statement in accordance with the criteria set forth in Note 1. Our responsibility is to express an opinion on this Statement based on our examination.

Our examination was conducted in accordance with attestation standards established by the American Institute of Certified Public Accountants and the standards applicable to attestation engagements contained in *Government Auditing Standards* issued by the Comptroller General of the United States. Those standards require that we plan and perform the examination to obtain reasonable assurance about whether the Statement is presented in accordance with the criteria described above, in all material respects. An examination involves performing procedures to obtain evidence about the statement of receipts and disbursements. The nature, timing and extent of the procedures selected depend on our judgement, including an assessment of the risks of material misstatement of the Statement, whether due to fraud or error. We believe that the evidence we obtained is sufficient and appropriate to provide a reasonable basis for our opinion.

We are mandated by Sections 401(b) and 401(d) of *The Fiscal Code* 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. *Government Auditing Standards* issued by the Comptroller General of the United States include attestation engagements as a separate type of audit. An attestation engagement performed pursuant to *Government Auditing Standards* involves additional standards that exceed the standards provided by the American Institute of Certified Public Accountants. Accordingly, this attestation engagement complies with both *Government Auditing Standards* and Sections 401(b) and 401(d) of *The Fiscal Code*.

## Independent Auditor's Report (Continued)

In our opinion, the Statement referred to above, for the period January 1, 2016 to December 31, 2019, is presented in accordance with the criteria set forth in Note 1, in all material respects.

In accordance with *Government Auditing Standards*, we are required to report all deficiencies that are considered to be significant deficiencies or material weaknesses in internal control; fraud and noncompliance with provisions of laws or regulations that have a material effect on the Statement; and any other instances that warrant the attention of those charged with governance; noncompliance with provisions of contracts or grant agreements, and abuse that has a material effect on the Statement. We are also required to obtain and report the views of responsible officials concerning the findings, conclusions, and recommendations, as well as any planned corrective actions. We performed our examination to express an opinion on whether the Statement is presented in accordance with the criteria described above and not for the purpose of expressing an opinion on internal control over reporting on the Statement or on compliance and other matters; accordingly, we express no such opinions.

A *deficiency in internal control* exists when the design or operation of a control does not allow management or employees, in the normal course of performing their assigned functions, to prevent, or detect and correct, misstatements on a timely basis. A *material weakness* is a deficiency, or a combination of deficiencies, in internal control, such that there is a reasonable possibility that a material misstatement of the Statement will not be prevented, or detected and corrected on a timely basis. A *significant deficiency* is a deficiency, or a combination of deficiencies, in internal control that is less severe than a material weakness, yet important enough to merit attention by those charged with governance.

Our consideration of internal control was for the limited purpose of expressing an opinion on whether the Statement is presented in accordance with the criteria described above and was not designed to identify all deficiencies in internal control over reporting on the Statement that might be material weaknesses or significant deficiencies. Given these limitations, during our engagement we did not identify any deficiencies in internal control that we consider to be material weaknesses. However, material weaknesses may exist that have not been identified.

As part of obtaining reasonable assurance about whether the Statement is free from material misstatement, we performed tests of the County Officer's compliance with certain provisions of laws, regulations, contracts, and grant agreements, noncompliance with which could have a direct and material effect on the determination of Statement amounts. However, providing an opinion on compliance with those provisions was not an objective of our engagement, and accordingly, we do not express such an opinion. The results of our tests disclosed no instances of noncompliance or other matters that are required to be reported under *Government Auditing Standards*.

Independent Auditor's Report (Continued)

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.

We appreciate the courtesy extended by the Prothonotary, Northampton County, to us during the course of our examination. If you have any questions, please feel free to contact Bureau of County Audits at 717-787-1363.



Eugene A. DePasquale  
Auditor General

August 11, 2020

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PROTHONOTARY  
NORTHAMPTON COUNTY  
STATEMENT OF RECEIPTS AND DISBURSEMENTS  
FOR THE PERIOD  
JANUARY 1, 2016 TO DECEMBER 31, 2019

Receipts:

Writ Taxes	\$ 15,412
Divorce Complaint Surcharges	31,530
Judicial Computer System/Access To Justice Fees	775,641
Protection From Abuse Surcharges and Contempt Fines	26,396
Criminal Charge Information System Fees	<u>12,626</u>
Total Receipts (Note 2)	861,605
Commissions (Note 3)	<u>(462)</u>
Net Receipts	861,143
Disbursements to Commonwealth (Note 4)	<u>(861,143)</u>
Balance due Commonwealth (County) per settled reports (Note 5)	-
Examination adjustments	<u>-</u>
Adjusted balance due Commonwealth (County) for the period January 1, 2016 to December 31, 2019	<u><u>\$ -</u></u>

Notes to the Statement of Receipts and Disbursements are an integral part of this report.

PROTHONOTARY  
NORTHAMPTON COUNTY  
NOTES TO THE STATEMENT OF RECEIPTS AND DISBURSEMENTS  
FOR THE PERIOD  
JANUARY 1, 2016 TO DECEMBER 31, 2019

1. Criteria

The Statement 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 Statement 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.

2. Receipts

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 represent a \$.50 or \$.25 tax imposed on taxable instruments filed with the Prothonotary.
- Divorce Complaint Surcharges represent a \$10 surcharge imposed on all divorce decrees.
- Judicial Computer System/Access To Justice Fees represent a \$35.50 fee 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 represent a \$100 surcharge imposed against defendants when a protection order is granted as a result of a hearing. Protection From Abuse Contempt Fines represent 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 represent a fee 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 fee was \$8.00 for the period January 1, 2015 to December 31, 2017, and \$8.50 for the period January 1, 2018 to December 31, 2019. The statement of receipts and disbursements only reflects the portion collected on behalf of the AOPC.

PROTHONOTARY  
NORTHAMPTON COUNTY  
NOTES TO THE STATEMENT OF RECEIPTS AND DISBURSEMENTS  
FOR THE PERIOD  
JANUARY 1, 2016 TO DECEMBER 31, 2019

3. Commissions

Acting in the capacity of an agent for the Commonwealth, the Prothonotary is authorized to collect a commission of 3 percent on the Commonwealth portion of Writ Taxes. Accordingly, commissions owed the county are not included in the balance due the Commonwealth.

4. Disbursements

Total disbursements are comprised as follows:

Prothonotary checks issued to:

Department of Revenue	\$	848,517
Adminstrative Office of Pennsylvania Courts		12,626
Total	\$	861,143

5. Balance Due Commonwealth (County) For The Period January 1, 2016 To December 31, 2019

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.

6. Prior Examination Period Balance Due

We noted that there was a prior examination balance due the County of \$24, which was not taken as of the end of our current examination period.

7. County Officer Serving During Examination Period

Holly Ruggiero served as Prothonotary during the period January 1, 2016 to December 31, 2019.



PROTHONOTARY  
NORTHAMPTON COUNTY  
SUMMARY OF PRIOR EXAMINATION RECOMMENDATIONS  
FOR THE PERIOD  
JANUARY 1, 2016 TO DECEMBER 31, 2019

Summary Of Prior Examination Recommendations

During our prior examination, we recommended that the office:

- Establish and implement an adequate system of internal controls over receipts.
- Establish procedures to periodically generate monitoring reports that include the date, time, reason for change(s), change(s) made, and who made the change(s).
- Continue to take prudent steps to properly secure their production servers from unauthorized access using the remote access software installed on their system.
- Negotiate an updated contract and software maintenance agreement with the Vendor.
- Always maintain an updated contract so as to provide appropriate legal recourse in the event of disputes with the Vendor.
- Office users be required to periodically change their passwords.

During our current examination, we noted that the office complied with our recommendations.

PROTHONOTARY  
NORTHAMPTON COUNTY  
REPORT DISTRIBUTION  
FOR THE PERIOD  
JANUARY 1, 2016 TO DECEMBER 31, 2019

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 Holly Ruggiero**  
Prothonotary

**The Honorable Tony E. Bassil**  
Controller

**The Honorable Ronald R. Heckman**  
President of the County Council

This report is a matter of public record and is available online at [www.PaAuditor.gov](http://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](mailto:news@PaAuditor.gov).