OIG BULLETIN
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Meeting the Mandate

OIG Reports on MassDOT's Service Plazas RFP



A unique legislative directive required the OIG to review and identify any "material objections" it has to MassDOT's draft contract for the rehabilitation and operation of its 18 highway service plazas.

In addition to the OIG's broad statutory purpose under Section 7 of Chapter 12A of the Massachusetts General Laws to "prevent and detect fraud, waste and abuse in the expenditure of public funds," the Legislature on occasion mandates that the OIG undertake specific directives.

For example, lawmakers mandated through Section 82 of Chapter 14 of the Acts of 2025 that the OIG review the Commonwealth's indigent defense system. The OIG's ensuing review culminated in a June 2026 report examining the system's cost effectiveness, attorney caseloads, and best practices from other jurisdictions. Also in June 2026, the OIG released a report on sheriffs' budgets and expenditures in line with the Legislature's directive in Section 164 of Chapter 73 of the Acts of 2025 that the OIG investigate and report on sheriffs' offices' spending, compensation levels, and compliance with state finance law. (To read more on both reports, see OIG Bulletin, Vol. 7, Issue 2, July 2026).

Continued on page 7

Engage, Educate, Investigate

At the annual MASSBUYS EXPO at Gillette Stadium on October 1, 2026, the OIG connected with public purchasing officials from government entities, nonprofits, and public educational institutions, as well as with vendors from around the Commonwealth. IG Shapiro spoke on the OIG's mission to (1) engage stakeholders on best governance and business practices, (2) educate public employees on procurement, fraud prevention, and program integrity, and (3) investigate complaints of fraud, waste, and abuse.



The OIG finds significant problems in the contracting practices of Boston Public Schools. **Page 10**

The OIG urges caution in a proposed long-term lease for Plymouth's Pilgrim Memorial Park. **Page 14**

A Word from Inspector General Jeffrey S. Shapiro

Working Together to Make Government Better



Good day.

As I begin my fifth year as Inspector General, I pause a moment to express my appreciation for you, our *OIG Bulletin* subscribers, who have chosen to keep current with the work of the OIG and continue to expand your knowledge of good procurement and government practices. When I started my tenure on October 3, 2022, I envisioned a proactive office that engaged with stakeholders in a number of ways, including raising public awareness of the office and its work. And through that awareness, to provide opportunities for public agencies and jurisdictions to consider how they can incorporate recommendations from OIG educational materials and investigations and reviews into their own preventive measures.

I am often asked how the office decides what to investigate or review. With the number and variety of government units in the Commonwealth, it isn't easy. In keeping with the independence that is critical to our mission, the OIG generally has broad discretion in deciding what matters to investigate. Even the OIG's statutory units – created by the Legislature to specifically oversee the Executive Office of Health and Human Services, the Massachusetts State Police, and the Massachusetts Department of Transportation – have discretion to decide where to focus their work.

As reflected in the pages that follow, the origins of our investigations and reviews include tips to our fraud hotline, statutorily required reports, and matters that we proactively initiate. In every instance, we think about the issues and concerns raised and then follow the facts to reach our conclusions in furtherance of our mission to prevent and detect fraud, waste, and abuse of public resources.

In this issue of the *OIG Bulletin*, we encourage you to look at the broad array of matters – from hotline investigations to statutorily mandated reports – for lessons that you can take back to your public agency or jurisdiction. While the reports and letters originate in different ways from discretionary decisions to mandated investigations, each has valuable recommendations for procurements, internal controls, and general governance. You are sure to find something of value, no matter the size or mission of your entity.

In this way, together, we can make government work better tomorrow than it works today.

Best,



Jeffrey S. Shapiro, Esq., CIG



In This Issue

1 Meeting the Mandate: OIG Reports on MassDOT's Service Plaza RFP

1 Engage, Educate, Investigate

4 Recent Investigations and Case Updates

6 OIG Recommends Town Improve Procurement and Timekeeping Policies

8 Lessons Learned from the MBTA's Warehousing Privatization

10 OIG Identifies Significant Problems in BPS Contracting Practices

12 On the Road with IG Shapiro

14 OIG Urges Caution with Proposed Long-Term Lease

16 OIG Academy News

17 Comings and Goings

The OIG engaged with public procurement professionals from around the Commonwealth at the MASSBUYS EXPO at Gillette Stadium on October 1.

Protect Your Community

If you suspect fraud, waste, or abuse of public funds, you can confidentially report your concerns.

Fill out our Fraud Reporting Form

Send us an email at IGO-FightFraud@mass.gov

Have a Question About Chapter 30B?

Send us an email at OIGProcurementSupport@mass.gov

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Recent Investigations and Case Updates

Lawrence Mayor Charged with Pandemic Loan Fraud and Money Laundering

"These funds were allocated to provide a safety net for small businesses coping with the fallout of the worldwide public health crisis. For an elected official to have allegedly defrauded this program for his own personal gain is an egregious breach of the public trust."

-IG Jeffrey Shapiro

Lawrence Mayor Brian DePena was arrested on August 14, 2026, and charged with fraudulently obtaining over $1.5 million in pandemic relief funds, which he allegedly used to pay high-interest mortgages on properties he owned in Lawrence, pay his personal taxes, and contribute to his mayoral campaign fund.

DePena allegedly applied for Economic Injury Disaster Loans (EIDL) for a tire sales and automative services company he owned in Lawrence, and, following modifications, received a total of $1,654,400 in pandemic relief funds. DePena is alleged to have used over $880,000 of these funds to pay off high-interest mortgages on properties he owned in Lawrence. He also allegedly used the EIDL funds to pay off personal tax debts to the IRS, and deposited over $42,000 of these funds in his mayoral campaign account.

DePena was elected as mayor of Lawrence in November 2021 and was reelected in November 2025. He previously served on the Lawrence City Council from 2016 to 2021.

The OIG investigated the case, in cooperation with the Federal Bureau of Investigation, the IRS, and the United States Attorney's Office.

State Representative Charged with Misusing $700,000 in Pandemic Relief Funds

Massachusetts State Representative Francisco Paulino, representing Lawrence and Methuen, was arrested on August 26, 2026, and charged with fraudulently obtaining $700,000 in pandemic relief funds. Paulino then allegedly used these funds to make real estate purchases, loan money to clients of his mortgage business, and fund his political campaign.

According to the indictment, Paulino is alleged to have applied for and received $44,000 in Pandemic Unemployment Assistance benefits using the name of a relative, without that relative's knowledge. Paulino is also alleged to have used multiple schemes to fraudulently obtain Economic Injury Disaster Loans (EIDLs), including falsely representing the revenues of a fast food restaurant café business and obtaining a fraudulent EIDL modification for a client of his tax business.

The OIG investigated the case, in cooperation with the Federal Bureau of Investigation, the Department of Labor Office of the Inspector General, and the U.S. Attorney's Office.

Former Grafton Select Board Chair Pleads Guilty to Defrauding Investors

On September 9, 2026, the former chair of the town of Grafton Board of Selectmen, Bruce Spinney, pleaded guilty to federal charges related to defrauding investors of his cannabis company, Noble Manna.

Federal indictments allege that after resigning from his town position in 2019, Spinney solicited hundreds of thousands of dollars from investors under the pretense of constructing and licensing his marijuana dispensary. He then used the investors' funds to pay his existing debts for personal purchases, delinquent property taxes, and debts from his other businesses. According to the indictments, Spinney used his municipal position to attract investors.

The indictment stemmed from a joint investigation by the OIG, the Federal Bureau of Investigation, and the U.S. Attorney's Office. Spinney's sentencing hearing is currently scheduled for December 10.

Former Watertown Housing Authority Director to Repay $6,200 in Stolen Funds

Former Watertown Housing Authority (WHA) Executive Director Michael Lara has agreed to return over $6,200 that he stole from WHA and used for home renovations.

Lara, in addition to his role at WHA, also served as the president of the Watertown Housing Development Corporation (WHDC). In 2023, Lara used his access to WHA's and WHDC's credit card accounts to purchase items such as faucets, shower heads, a vanity, mirror, and lights, which he had installed in his home's bathroom.

Lara concealed the purchases by falsely listing them as WHA rental purchases.

The OIG investigated the case in response to a hotline complaint and worked in conjunction with the Federal Bureau of Investigation and the U.S. Attorney's Office, which ultimately prosecuted the matter.

"It is deeply troubling when a public employee steals any amount of public funds for their own use," IG Shapiro said. "I am thankful to my federal enforcement partners for pursuing this case and holding this individual accountable. I also want to thank the person who contacted the OIG's Fraud Hotline to report this. I encourage anyone who suspects fraud, waste, or abuse of public funds to contact our hotline."



"[Paulino's] alleged conduct uncovered today plus [DePena's] alleged conduct uncovered two weeks ago not only diverted federal pandemic funds from individuals and small businesses who truly needed such relief to get back on their feet but also violated the oath that these two public officials took to uphold the law," IG Shapiro said when Paulino's arrest was announced. "These defendants were elected to serve the public, and instead it is alleged that they served themselves. Public service should never be self-service."

OIG Recommends Town Improve Procurement and Timekeeping Policies

Tags: Internal oversight, procurement approvals, timekeeping, remote work policies, paid time off policies, fiduciary responsibilities

The OIG recently made several recommendations to the town of Norfolk and the Norfolk Select Board in an August 2026 public letter to the town. The OIG had received two complaints in 2025 alleging the misuse and misappropriation of Norfolk town funds. In its ensuing investigation, the OIG found that former Department of Public Works (DPW) Director Blair Crane violated procurement laws and improperly diverted town resources for the private benefit of another former town official. The OIG also found that former Town Administrator Justin Casanova-Davis misused vacation time for his personal benefit.

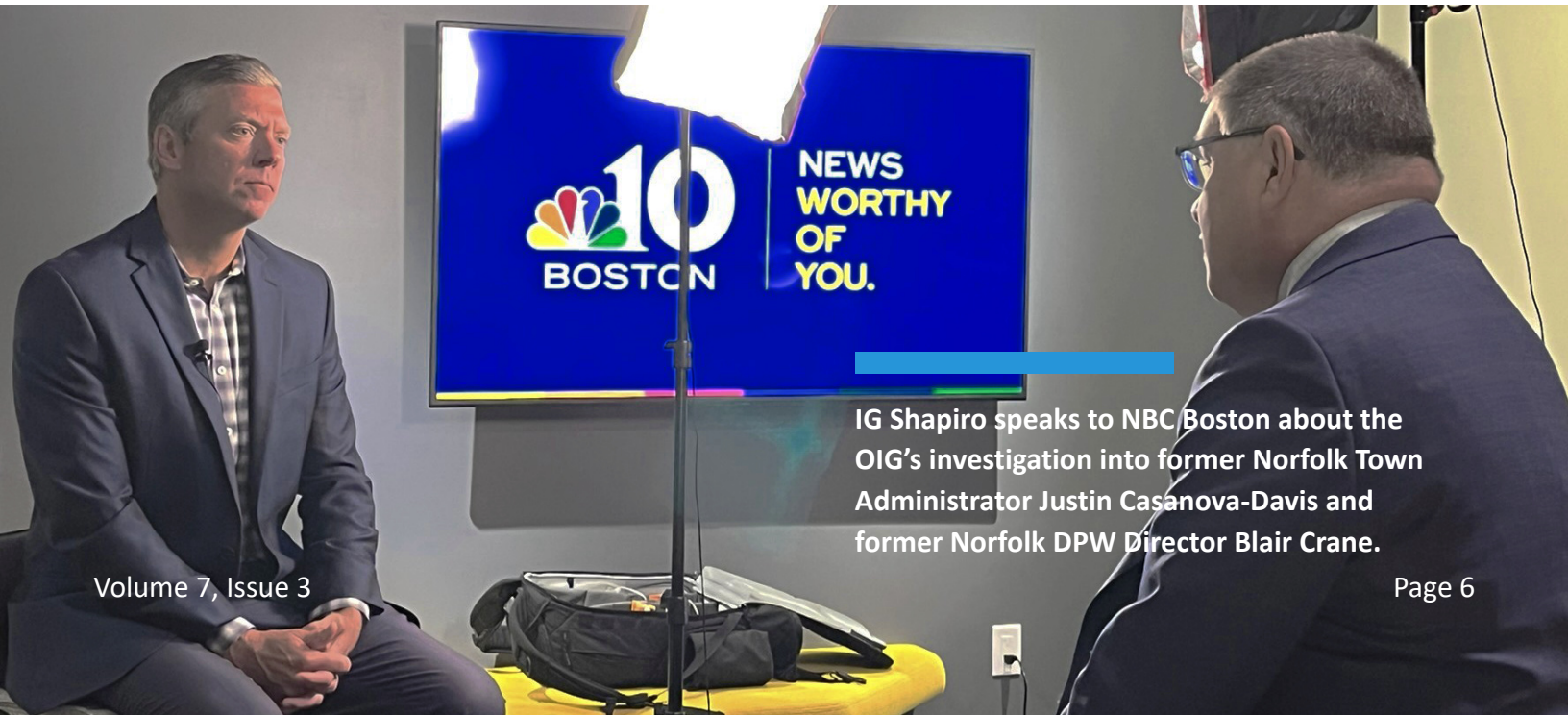
The OIG offered a number recommendations related to the town's procurement, financial management, and timekeeping policies that other jurisdictions should consider as they look at their own practices.

"The Commonwealth's governmental bodies must act as effective stewards of public funds and properly control and account for all public assets. The town [Norfolk] must work to ensure that state law and town policies on procurements, remote work, vacation, and oversight of town employees are properly discharged. Controls around the spending of public dollars should reflect the obligation public officials have to be strong stewards of these resources, which are so limited."

- IG Jeffrey Shapiro

For instance, the OIG recommended that the town implement policies and procedures requiring higher-level review and approval of procurements and reimbursements.

What level of approval does your jurisdiction have in place?



IG Shapiro speaks to NBC Boston about the OIG's investigation into former Norfolk Town Administrator Justin Casanova-Davis and former Norfolk DPW Director Blair Crane.

The OIG also advised that the town create a comprehensive remote work policy and adopt a digital timekeeping system so that municipal employees can more accurately record their working time, vacation time, sick time, and personal time.

What does your jurisdiction have in place for timekeeping policies and procedures for regular employees, as well as those working under employment contracts? Remote work policies? Policies for the acceptable use of sick, vacation, and personal time?

The OIG further recommended that Norfolk's department heads, financial personnel, and Select Board members enroll in appropriate training to help them better understand their fiduciary and oversight duties related to the town's procurements and finances.

What training do you provide to department heads and boards on their fiduciary and oversight responsibilities?

Meeting the Mandate: OIG Reports on MassDOT's Service Plazas RFP

continued from front page

Tags: Contract formation, RFPs

Another unique legislative directive for the OIG lies in Section 64 of Chapter 6C of the Massachusetts General Laws (Section 64), which requires the OIG to note any "material objections" to draft contracts proposed by MassDOT when it uses the public-private partnership infrastructure oversight commission (P3 Commission) process. A P3 Commission is an independent entity that oversees the development of MassDOT's requests for proposals (RFPs) and contracts for services to be delivered through public-private partnerships and approves the RFPs and contracts prior to their issuance.

Enter MassDOT's decision to procure a vendor to rehabilitate and operate the Commonwealth's 18 travel service plazas along the Massachusetts Turnpike and other state highways. As the current operator's leases neared expiration, MassDOT issued a procurement in September 2024 seeking a vendor to rehabilitate and operate the facilities for an initial term of 35 years. The procurement was ultimately unsuccessful, with the selected vendor walking away from contract negotiations in September 2025.

To read the OIG's February 2026 letter to MassDOT about that procurement, click here.

In March 2026, MassDOT announced that it would use the P3 Commission model in conducting a new procurement for the rehabilitation and operation of the service plazas, triggering the OIG's review requirement under Section 64. MassDOT had a proposed contract and RFP ready in August 2026. The OIG evaluated the documents consistent with Section 64 and provided its findings in a September 2026 report to MassDOT and the P3 Commission.

As we wait for the Service Plaza RFP and contract to be finalized, the OIG takes this opportunity to highlight some best practices for procurements using the RFP process:

- ***Provide guidance and formal training for the evaluators on conflicts of interest and require written disclosures of real and apparent conflicts;***
- ***Weight the evaluation criteria in the RFP to ensure that evaluators know the highest priorities for the award and bidders have the opportunity to put forth their best responses;***
- ***Provide training and written guidance on how the evaluators must document the strengths and weaknesses of each proposal;***
- ***Use a sealed scoring process to avoid undue influence among evaluators; and***
- ***Keep and maintain records of the evaluation and scoring process.***



A Red Line train is stationed in Cabot Rail Yard.

Lessons Learned from the MBTA's Warehousing Privatization

Tags: Procurement procedures, performance metrics, contract management, vendor negotiations

The OIG's review of the Massachusetts Bay Transportation Authority's (MBTA) nine-year contract with Mancon, LLC, for warehousing and logistics services revealed poor contract management and vendor negotiations which led the MBTA to overpay for services. While privatizing the MBTA's parts storage and delivery functions did improve inventory accuracy in the MBTA's central warehouses and shortened the time it took to deliver parts to its garages and car houses, the MBTA could not show that the contract reduced operating costs. Instead, the OIG found that the MBTA removed multiple vendor obligations without reducing the contract rates it was paying.

"The MBTA is a steward of public funds. When it does procurements or renegotiates contracts, those that do so must always remember that these are public dollars; that must be at the forefront of their minds. As such, any reduction in the contract's scope should be accompanied by a renegotiation of the price the MBTA pays under the contract."

-IG Jeffrey Shapiro

This is the fifth contract that the OIG has reviewed for a service which the MBTA privatized pursuant to the privatization waiver, which exempted the MBTA for a three-year period from the more stringent privatization requirements of the Taxpayer Protection Act. The waiver required the OIG to review four aspects of such privatizations: the fairness and competitiveness of the procurement process, the quality of the services provided, the expected and actual costs of the contract, and the cost of the contract weighed against the benefits.

The OIG's review showed that Mancon performed poorly in the first two years of the contract (2017 and 2018), due in part to its lack of experience with rail parts. The MBTA did not properly monitor Mancon's performance, citing that the performance metrics outlined in the contract were too vague to measure or enforce.

In 2018, the MBTA and Mancon restated the contract terms. In doing so, the MBTA reduced the contract scope by eliminating some of Mancon's responsibilities, including two performance metrics and a requirement that Mancon provide a warehouse inventory system. Despite this significant reduction in Mancon's obligations, the contract rates of the restated contract remained the same. This – coupled with the MBTA's failure to hold Mancon accountable when it did not fulfill a principal element of its proposal by partnering with a company with rail industry expertise – signaled poor fiduciary oversight of public funds.

What lessons can be learned from the MBTA's Mancon engagement?

- ***Ensure that all of your stakeholders are involved in developing RFPs so that the resulting contracts meet your jurisdiction's needs;***
- ***Actively manage your contracts;***
- ***Track and use incentives and penalties effectively to drive vendor performance, using understandable formulas; and***
- ***Renegotiate price when renegotiating services.***



A Green Line train pulls into Riverside Rail Yard.



OIG Identifies Significant Problems in BPS Contracting Practices

Tags: Procurement procedures, sole source contracts, invoice review, budgeting, oversight

OIG investigations launched in response to multiple complaints found that Boston Public Schools' (BPS) Division of Operations wasted public funds through its failure to follow procurement and contracting requirements.

As described in its August 26, 2026 report, *Boston Public Schools – Procurements, Contracts, and Payments*, the OIG found that the BPS Division of Operations spent at least $857,261 in public funds either improperly or in violation of state procurement law. The OIG found that BPS lacked effective accounts payable and contract management controls. The OIG also concluded that BPS's convoluted procurement, contract administration, invoicing, and payment approval processes have contributed to delays in payments to BPS vendors and have prompted BPS procurement employees and vendors to search for workarounds.

What went wrong, and what can your agency or jurisdiction do to prevent similar problems?

BPS had policies and procedures for approving procurements that were disorganized, inefficient, and burdensome to employees and vendors. The process made it challenging to approve and track contracts. Management and officials in procurements and accounts payable did not recognize that



employees were creating work-arounds to difficult procedures rather than addressing budget issues. For example, BPS sometimes paid vendors using "passthrough" invoices funneled through secondary vendors.

You should regularly review and update procurement policies for your agency or jurisdiction and establish a streamlined approach for accounts payable procedures and contract and change order approvals.

BPS violated municipal procurement law by purchasing textbooks through a sole source contract, despite those books being readily available online and through other vendors. Your agency or jurisdiction should ensure compliance with procurement law, which authorizes a sole source contract when only one practicable source of the goods or services exists.

You should review the goods or scope of services needed for your agency or jurisdiction and confirm their general availability before considering a sole source procurement.

BPS wasted significant public dollars when it failed to closely review shipping costs on invoices and purchase orders.

You should ensure that your staff takes a look at shipping costs as part of the invoice review process. The reviewing parties should know the contract terms to determine if such costs are reasonable.

BPS has lacked appropriate accounts payable and contract management controls and has not effectively overseen large service contracts.

You should have efficient tracking and budgeting processes, as well as robust internal controls that allow for effective contract oversight.

On the Road With IG Shapiro

IG Shapiro's listening tour has continued to take him into city and town halls, public education institutions, and other state and municipal sites where public servants are making government work. Since the start of 2026, IG Shapiro has made 35 official municipal visits and met with 28 state agencies.



IG Shapiro visits Mohawk Trail in Franklin County, to gain insight into the responsibilities of Department of Conservation and Recreation (DCR) employees in state forests. IG Shapiro and Mohawk Complex Field Operations Team Leader Luke Labendz stand in the Trees of Peace Grove, dedicated by DCR in 1997 to the indigenous inhabitants of Turtle Island, who originally established the Mohawk Trail. The Eastern White Pine, pictured here, is considered sacred in many Native American traditions.



IG Shapiro meets with the UMass Lowell Chancellor Dr. Julie Chen, as part of his continued engagement with public education institutions throughout the Commonwealth.



IG Shapiro visits MassDOT Highway District One and meets with District One's Highway Director Francisca Heming.

"I've spent my entire career in public service because I believe in government. I believe in public education, public libraries, public transportation, and public housing."

IG Jeffrey Shapiro



IG Shapiro peruses documents at the Southern Essex County Register of Deeds.

OIG Urges Caution with Proposed Long-Term Lease

Tags: Long-term leases

In an August 4 letter to Gov. Maura Healey and Lt. Gov. Kim Driscoll, IG Shapiro called for the veto of a proposed bill that would allow the Commonwealth to lease the Pilgrim Memorial Park to the town of Plymouth for 25 years with the possibility of unlimited 10-year extensions.

IG Shapiro raised several concerns with Senate Bill 3235, *An Act Relative to the Pilgrim Memorial Park in Plymouth*, pointing out that the legislation:

1. Fails to identify a party responsible for capital improvements;

2. Allows for 10-year extensions in perpetuity, without identifying procedures or guidance should the parties not agree to an extension;

3. States that the park will be accessible to the public "when not in use by permittees," with no parameters establishing minimum public use time;

The OIG regularly reviews proposed legislation and provides input to the Legislature on issues relevant to the OIG's oversight responsibilities.

4. Does not specify how the town of Plymouth may use any fees that it establishes for the park;

5. Remains silent on the required condition of the park upon Plymouth's return of the land to the Commonwealth at the end of the lease; and

6. Does not speak to the amount of compensation, if any, that the Commonwealth would receive from the lease.



Pilgrim Memorial Park houses the Massachusetts and national historical landmark Plymouth Rock.

IG Shapiro emphasized that these ambiguities could lead to problems in managing the state asset over time. In other long-term lease agreements that the OIG has examined, there were instances when the subject property was returned to the Commonwealth in poor condition at the lease's end. By moving forward with the Pilgrim Memorial Park lease as written, the OIG cautioned that the Commonwealth would incur a similar risk with this historic property.

Gov. Healey subsequently addressed many of the OIG's concerns and on August 13 submitted an amended bill to the Legislature for consideration as Senate Bill 3254.

Takeaway for your jurisdiction: When considering a long-term lease of your property, ensure that the lease specifies who is responsible for maintenance and capital improvements; whether the lease can be extended and when and how the option is exercised; how rent is calculated, verified, and audited; and the expectations for the condition of the property when it reverts to the jurisdiction. And of course, document your decision-making, keep thorough records of rent payments and costs for maintenance and improvements, and assign oversight responsibility to a specific department within your jurisdiction.

Investing in Our Staff

The OIG is committed to investing in its staff's professional development, both to support team members in achieving their career goals and to equip the OIG team with the skills to effectively protect the public's resources. Certification through the Association of Inspectors General (AIG) Certified Inspector General Institute is one such form of professional development, offering certified training in skills and standards pertinent to the roles of inspectors general and related oversight professionals, including investigators, auditors, and counsel.



OIG team members received certifications at the AIG Institute in Washington D.C. in August 2026, including (from left to right) Deputy General Counsel James Craig, Deputy Inspector General Susanne O'Neil, Division of State Police Oversight Investigators Andrew Barrett and Julia Albert, and Audit, Oversight & Investigations Senior Investigator David Bell.

Fall classes are filling fast

The OIG Academy educates state and local government employees, procurement professionals, and private individuals on good governance, public purchasing laws, contract administration, fraud prevention, and many other topics.

Be sure to schedule time during the busy fall months to take advantage of the wide range of courses that the Academy is currently offering, including classes on procurement basics, board and commission member responsibilities, managing program risks, and revenue-generating contracts. As always, the Academy is also presenting the three classes necessary to earn the Massachusetts Certified Public Purchasing Official (MCPPO) Designation – *Public Contracting Overview*, *Supplies and Services Contracting*, and *Design and Construction Contracting*. Holders of the Designation may also renew their credential through the MCCPO renewal class.

Check out the Academy's course catalog for a full list of classes, along with registration information. To find out more on the MCPPO Designation, visit the OIG Academy's website.

Reminder! MCPPO Renewal Amnesty Program is Underway

Has your MCCPO Designation lapsed? Consider the new **MCPPO Renewal Amnesty Program**, which allows municipal employees with an MCPPO Designation that lapsed between January 1, 2020, and December 31, 2025, to reinstate their Designation without having to retake the full 60-credit program.

Individuals who enroll and complete the renewal course and six additional continuing education credits between July 1, 2026, and June 30, 2027, will be able to apply for Designation renewal under this special program.

Continued on page 17

Coming Soon!

Updated *Designing and Constructing Public Facilities* Manual

Keep your eyes open for a soon-to-be-issued new edition of the OIG's *Designing and Constructing Public Facilities* manual, the go-to resource for guidance on public construction projects in Massachusetts. Among other changes, the new edition will incorporate the most recent statutory changes to the Commonwealth's public design and construction laws, will provide the most up-to-date interpretations of those laws from the Attorney General, and will update references and links. Stay tuned!

If you register for a class and are then unable to attend, please log in to the OIG Academy Dashboard and click on "Request Drop" to request a transfer or refund and to give those on the waiting list an opportunity to take the class.

Applicants must be authorized by their municipality's mayor, select board chair, or town administrator/manager.

The OIG will cover the $495 cost of the MCPPO renewal course as part of the amnesty program.

Please note that the Academy depends on class revenues to operate, and the OIG has accordingly established amnesty program criteria that take into account a particular municipality's risk in not having an MCCPO professional.

Click here for more information and an amnesty program application.

Comings and Goings

Neil Cohen



The OIG bids farewell to Neil, Director of the Public Procurement and General Government Oversight Division, after 33 years of dedicated service to the OIG's mission. Neil's career at the OIG, spanning the tenures of four inspectors general, has included leading various office divisions, overseeing megaprojects such as the Big Dig, investigating allegations of fraud and waste, and coordinating the OIG's educational initiatives. The OIG thanks Neil for his invaluable contributions over three decades and wishes him well as he pursues new public service opportunities.



Bethany Wong

Bethany joins the OIG as General Counsel after more than a decade as a litigator with the Civil Division of the U.S. Attorney's Office for the District of Rhode Island. Appointed the Civil Division's Chief in 2022, Bethany represented the United States in a wide range of civil matters with a focus on procurement and healthcare fraud.



Heather Valcanas

Heather comes to the OIG as Director of the Bureau of Program Integrity, following a career managing health and human services programs in Massachusetts. Heather previously worked as Northeast Director of Quality Management for the Department of Mental Health in Tewksbury and as Director of Adult & Transitional Services for Valley Collaborative in Billerica.

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OIG ACADEMY

Class Information

To view the current class schedule and to register for a class electronically, please use the link below. If you have any questions, please contact us at (617) 722-8884.

Course Catalog

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