

GOVERNMENT OF THE DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA
Office of the Inspector General

Inspector General



**Executive Summary Concerning the Results
of an Office of the Inspector General Investigation
Into Misconduct Violations by an Employee of the
District of Columbia Office of Unified Communications**

2010-0311(S)

INVESTIGATIVE SYNOPSIS

The District of Columbia Office of the Inspector General (OIG) initiated an investigation in April 2010 after receiving allegations that an Office of Unified Communications (OUC) Customer Service Specialist referred an applicant seeking to schedule his Department of Motor Vehicles (DMV) road test to a specific driving instructor and offered to transfer the applicant's call to that driving instructor. The Customer Service Specialist made the referral after the applicant said that he did not own a vehicle equipped with a center hand brake, which is required for the road test. The investigation revealed that the Customer Service Specialist similarly has referred road test applicants to a specific driving instructor on at least eight other occasions. Accordingly, the Customer Service Specialist's conduct violated three sections of the District Personnel Manual (DPM).

During the investigation, OIG investigators reviewed recordings of nine calls to the DMV Customer Service Center, which were handled by the Customer Service Specialist, between April 5, 2010, and June 7, 2010. In addition, OIG investigators interviewed the two driving school instructors to whom the Customer Service Specialist referred callers, as well as the Customer Service Specialist.

The investigation revealed that, on April 5, 2010, a customer called the DMV Customer Service Center to schedule a DMV road test and spoke to the Customer Service Specialist. During the call, the Customer Service Specialist provided the customer with an agreed upon road test date, the road test location, and a confirmation number. As the Customer Service Specialist was concluding the call, the Customer Service Specialist told the customer that he must take the road test with a vehicle equipped with a center hand brake. After the customer told the Customer Service Specialist that the vehicle he owns does not have a center hand brake, the Customer Service Specialist said that she could refer the customer to a driving instructor (driving instructor 1). The Customer Service Specialist told the customer that driving instructor 1 works at the road test location and provided the customer with the driving instructor 1's telephone number. Although the

Customer Service Specialist offered to transfer the call to driving instructor 1, the customer declined saying that he would call the driving instructor. The Customer Service Specialist concluded that call by saying the customer should tell driving instructor 1 that the Customer Service Specialist referred him.¹

OIG investigators identified driving instructor 1 and the name of the driving school he owns and operates. OIG investigators also determined that driving instructor 1 had retired from DMV in 2007. In an interview with OIG investigators, driving instructor 1 confirmed that he retired from the DMV in 2007, as a Driver's License Examiner. After retiring from the DMV, driving instructor 1 began working as a for-hire driving instructor and, in early 2008, started a driving school.

Driving instructor 1 told OIG investigators that he generates his business from Internet listings, the Yellow Pages, advertisements on his vehicles, and referrals. Driving instructor 1 acknowledged that he knows the Customer Service Specialist and that she refers to him DMV road test applicants who need to rent a vehicle. Driving instructor 1 told OIG investigators that he never met the Customer Service Specialist in person, and has had only telephone contact with her. Driving instructor 1 denied paying the Customer Service Specialist or giving her anything of value for the referrals.

In an interview with OIG investigators, the Customer Service Specialist stated that she began working for the D.C. government in 2003 as a Customer Service Specialist for the DMV.² As a Customer Service Specialist, she is responsible for assisting customers who call the DMV Customer Service Center with processing vehicle registrations, conducting transactions related to vehicle license plates and titles, and scheduling road tests. When scheduling a DMV road test, the Customer Service Specialist requests that each customer provide their learner's permit number and then enters it into her D.C. government computer. Once this information has been entered, a list of available dates and times for the road test is generated so that the Customer Service Specialist can allow the customer to choose a date. Once the road test has been scheduled, the Customer Service Specialist provides the customer with a confirmation number.

The Customer Service Specialist said she believes that she receives approximately 100 calls per day, approximately 50 of which are from applicants seeking to schedule road tests. Of those, approximately 20 callers do not have a vehicle that has an emergency hand brake between the two front seats, as required by DMV.

During her employment with DMV, the Customer Service Specialist was assigned to several DMV locations. She told OIG investigators that sometime in 2004 or 2005, while assigned to one particular location, the Customer Service Specialist met a different

¹ OIG investigators reviewed eight additional telephone calls, which took place between the Customer Service Specialist and road test applicants during the period of April 22, 2010, and June 7, 2010. The Customer Service Specialist referred each applicant to driving instructor 1.

² In 2008, DMV Customer Service Specialists were reassigned to OUC, but their primary duties remained the same.

driving instructor (driving instructor 2), who recently had provided driver's license training to the Customer Service Specialist's brother-in-law. At the time, driving instructor 2 operated a driving school.

The Customer Service Specialist admitted to OIG investigators that after she met driving instructor 2, she referred to him road test applicants who did not have a properly equipped vehicle, by providing the applicants with driving instructor 2's telephone number. The Customer Service Specialist said that she believed she was servicing the callers because although DMV, at times, had a limited number of vehicles customers could use to take their road tests, often the vehicles were in need of repair and unavailable. The Customer Service Specialist said that many applicants needed to obtain their drivers' licenses quickly because their livelihood depended on it. The Customer Service Specialist knew that driving instructor 2 had properly equipped vehicles and that he could be found at the road test location. The Customer Service Specialist told OIG investigators that she met driving instructor 2 on only that one occasion and denied that he ever gave her anything of value in exchange for referring business to him.

The Customer Service Specialist told OIG investigators that in early 2009, she learned that driving instructor 2 had retired. She contacted him and asked to whom she should refer applicants now that he was retired. Driving instructor 2 recommended that the Customer Service Specialist refer applicants to driving instructor 1. The Customer Service Specialist told OIG investigators that since that time, she has been referring road test applicants who need a vehicle that meets DMV requirements to driving instructor 1, with whom she communicates only by telephone and has never met. The Customer Service Specialist denied ever receiving anything of value from driving instructor 1 for the referrals.

The Customer Service Specialist stated that it is commonplace for Customer Service Specialists to refer applicants to specific vendors. She said that she did not know it was against OUC policy to make referrals until she attended a meeting at OUC in early July 2010, during which she was told it is against OUC policy to refer applicants to a specific vendor.

Driving instructor 2 was interviewed by OIG investigators and acknowledged that he knew the Customer Service Specialist. Driving instructor 2 said that he did not recall ever discussing referrals with the Customer Service Specialist and never learned from any of his clients that the Customer Service Specialist had referred them to his driving school. Driving instructor 2 stated that he was well-known because he taught driver's education in the D.C. Public Schools (DCPS) for several years. Driving instructor 2 believed that a lot of his referrals resulted from his DCPS contacts. Driving instructor 2 told OIG investigators that although he knew driving instructor 1, he does not recall having a conversation with the Customer Service Specialist about referring clients to driving instructor 1 after driving instructor 2's school closed in June 2009.

ANALYSIS AND CONCLUSIONS

Although the OIG investigation revealed no evidence that the Customer Service Specialist received anything of value for referring DMV road test applicants to specific driving instructors, her conduct violates three sections of the DPM. By making these referrals, the Customer Service Specialist gave preferential treatment to the driving instructors, lost complete independence and impartiality, and affected adversely the confidence of the public in the integrity of government.

Accordingly, this investigation has **SUBSTANTIATED** that the Customer Service Specialist committed the following violations:

1. DPM, Chapter 18 (Responsibilities of Employees) § 1803.1 (a) (2) Giving preferential treatment to any person;
2. DPM § 1803.1(a) (4) Losing complete independence or impartiality; and
3. DPM § 1803.1(a) (6) Affecting adversely the confidence of the public in the integrity of government.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the results of this investigation, the Office of the Inspector General recommends that OUC:

- Address the conduct of the Customer Service Specialist with appropriate administrative action;
- Provide training to customer service specialists to ensure compliance with District standards of conduct related to referrals to vendors; and
- Conduct a review of calls from road test applicants to determine whether any other OUC customer service specialists are or have referred road test applicants to specific driving instructors and address all such conduct with appropriate administrative action.

August 9, 2010