

**OFFICE OF THE INSPECTOR GENERAL  
CITY OF BALTIMORE**



**Isabel Mercedes Cumming  
Inspector General**

**Investigative  
Report Synopsis**

**OIG Case # 23-0036-I**

**Issued: July 25, 2023**



OFFICE OF THE INSPECTOR GENERAL  
Isabel Mercedes Cumming, Inspector General  
City Hall, Suite 635  
100 N. Holliday Street  
Baltimore, MD 21202



July 25, 2023

Dear Citizens of Baltimore City,

The mission of the Office of the Inspector General (OIG) is to promote accountability, efficiency, and integrity in City government, as well as to investigate complaints of fraud, financial waste, and abuse.

The OIG received a complaint in March 2023 alleging the Department of Telecommunications (Telecom) failed to suspend the service for mobile phones used during the City of Baltimore's (City) election process. According to the complaint, Telecom provides mobile phones to the Baltimore City Board of Elections (BCBOE) for use during the election process, and it suspends the phone service after the election cycle. The complaint asserted that Telecom did not suspend the service on these phones after the November 2022 election, costing the City approximately \$11,000 monthly.

### **BACKGROUND**

Telecom provides telephone services to all City agencies. These services include providing mobile devices, technical support, and managing the billing with external vendors. Additionally, Telecom is responsible for providing and storing approximately 400 mobile election phones for BCBOE. Telecom receives a monthly bill from the election phones' network service provider (Phone Service Provider).

The BCBOE manages the electoral process for the City during the primary and general election periods. There are numerous polling locations throughout the City staffed with election judges administering voting procedures under the purview of the Board. Chief election judges and other employees are temporarily equipped with a mobile phone to assist with election day duties.

### **INVESTIGATION**

The City's 2022 election process began on July 19<sup>th</sup> and concluded on November 8<sup>th</sup>. Several witnesses stated a former Telecom Communication Service Billing Supervisor (Former Supervisor) was responsible for the election phone billing until their City employment ended during the 2022 election cycle. A BCBOE Executive (BCBOE Executive) and other witnesses confirmed that, in prior election cycles, the Former Supervisor would activate the phone lines a month before the primary election and suspend the service after the general election concluded in November.

After an OIG interview, a Telecom employee (Telecom Employee) informed the BCBOE Executive on May 11, 2023, that the election phone lines were still active and Telecom had not received any requests to suspend the service. The BCBOE Executive replied that Telecom has always suspended the phone lines, and the suspension should have occurred on December 1, 2022.

The OIG reviewed the election phone bills from January to March 2023 and found the services for the election phones had yet to be suspended and were incurring monthly charges of over \$11,000. The OIG determined that Telecom made payments totaling \$33,514.89 for January to March 2023 invoices to the Phone Service Provider for the election phones.

#### **REPORT FRAUD, WASTE AND ABUSE**

HOTLINE: 443-984-3476/800-417-0430 EMAIL: [OIG@BALTIMORECITY.GOV](mailto:OIG@BALTIMORECITY.GOV) WEBSITE: [OIG.BALTIMORECITY.GOV](http://OIG.BALTIMORECITY.GOV)

*This public synopsis is only a summary of a more comprehensive report of investigation submitted to the appropriate City management official*

A Telecom Officer (Telecom Officer) stated the telephone coordinators for City agencies are encouraged to review their bills monthly. They added that changes to telephone services, such as a suspension, should be requested by submitting a service ticket through Telecom’s ticketing system. The Telecommunications Officer began supervising the Former Supervisor’s team after their departure but claimed not to receive any information regarding election phone processes during the transition.

The Telecom Officer followed up after their interview and reported they could not find a request from BCBOE to suspend the election phones in Telecom’s records. They confirmed that, in the past, the Former Supervisor and their team would suspend the phone lines after the election, reducing the monthly fee to an approximate cost of \$142. Table 1 below shows the cost difference between the invoices paid and the approximate suspended monthly rate provided by the Telecom Officer.

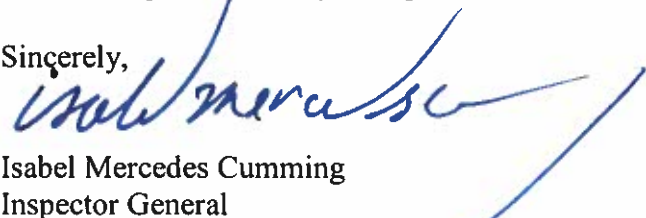
*Table 1: Election Phone Invoice Payments Compared to Suspended Rate*

Invoice Issued Date	Amount	Suspended Rate	Cost Difference
Jan 24, 2023	\$11,171.63	\$142	\$11,029.63
Feb 24, 2023	\$11,171.63	\$142	\$11,029.63
Mar 24, 2023	\$11,171.63	\$142	\$11,029.63
<b>TOTAL</b>			<b>\$33,088.89</b>

**INVESTIGATIVE FINDINGS**

The OIG learned that, in the past, BCBOE’s election phone lines were suspended by Telecom one month after the general election. According to this practice, the phone lines should have been suspended in December 2022, which the Telecom Officer stated would reduce the bill to an approximate monthly fee of \$142. The OIG found the election phone services were still active and paid from January to March, totaling unnecessary service charges of \$33,088.89. As a direct result of the OIG investigation’s inquiries, Telecom contacted the Phone Service Provider to suspend the phone lines and request a credit for the invoices paid. The OIG learned that Telecom recently was granted approval from the Phone Service Provider for a credit of \$41,209.02.<sup>1</sup>

The OIG recommends BCBOE and Telecom create written procedures for the election phone process to ensure activation and suspension for the phone lines are documented and occur at the appropriate times, even when personnel may change.

Sincerely,  
  
 Isabel Mercedes Cumming  
 Inspector General

- CC: Hon. Brandon M. Scott, Mayor of Baltimore City  
 Hon. Nick Mosby, Baltimore City Council President  
 Hon. Bill Henry, Baltimore City Comptroller  
 Honorable Members of the Baltimore City Council  
 Hon. Ebony Thompson, Acting Baltimore City Solicitor

<sup>1</sup> The credit of \$41,209.02 includes a partial credit towards the April 2023 bill.