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**Comptroller Schnirman Releases Part II and Part III of
County Government Nepotism Audit Series**

*Audits Examined the Processes and Practices of the Nassau County Office of Human
Resources and the Nassau County Civil Service Commission*

*Nepotism Series Recommends Reforms to Modernize and Represent the Fairness,
Equity, Uniformity as Originally Envisioned by Theodore Roosevelt in His Push for a
Merit-Based Civil Service System*

*Calls for all Nassau-based Colleges to Receive Updates on Civil Service Tests & Jobs to
Keep Next Generation On Long Island*

MINEOLA, NY - Nassau County Comptroller Jack Schnirman released the second and third parts of the Comptroller's Office's ongoing audits of related parties (nepotism) within Nassau County's government. The audits specifically focused on the Nassau County Office of Human Resources and the Nassau County Civil Service Commission.

In 2018, the Office of the Nassau County Comptroller initiated the first-ever audit on Nepotism in Nassau County. The audits focused in sequential order on the Nassau County Board of Ethics, the Nassau County Office of Human Resources, and the Nassau County Civil Service Commission. These entities are the appropriate safeguards within the county government to protect from favoritism and nepotism in the hiring process and to ensure a county workforce who will carry out their duties with integrity and are hired based upon qualifications and merit. This multi-part audit isn't about playing "gotcha," but is about identifying and strengthening the processes, policies, and practices embedded within the County, that prevent favoritism in hiring and to determine the processes, policies, and procedures which fail to prevent nepotism in hiring.

"Best practices serve to ensure that County government works best for all of us, not just those who are well-connected," said **Nassau County Comptroller Jack Schnirman**. "For instance, as Part II of our audit series troublingly demonstrates, a supervisor should not find out for the first time at a retirement party that the retiring employee is related to others that they supervise. Our Anti-Nepotism

review has taken a hard look at the Office of Human Resources and the practices of our Civil Service Commission. We identified deficiencies and outlined a number of improvements that can ensure better government for the people of Nassau County. With a transition in administrations and the multitude of new hires this naturally brings, there couldn't be a more appropriate time to highlight the safeguards that need to be in place to ensure integrity, fairness, and equity and protect against favoritism and nepotism."

Part II of the audit series is focused on the Office of Human Resources. The Nassau County Office of Human Resources is responsible for the development and administration of programs that directly affect all employees, such as: organizational development, compensation analysis, professional training, recruitment, benefits review, and enhancement, performance analysis and establishment of wellness and value programs.

Among other findings:

- The Office of Human Resources lacks policies to ensure that the Nassau County Code of Ethics requirements concerning nepotism (hiring and supervision of relatives) are being monitored and enforced by departments. The Code of Ethics, which requires that no employee or County officer hire or induce others to hire a relative, is the first line of protection against nepotism in Nassau County. It is imperative that all employees understand the prohibitions against nepotism as included in the Code of Ethics in order to have a fair and equitable hiring system;
- The Office of Human Resources deviated from County policy by not requesting Civil Service background checks on 50% of the files sampled (39 employees out of 78), giving the appearance of a lack of equity or fairness, and potential nepotism as several select individuals were excluded from the background check process;
- Nepotism was likely involved in the hiring of a relative of the former County Executive's friend/County contractor;
- Over 40 Ordinance employees were moved into Civil Service protected positions and placed in non-competitive job titles prior to the 2018 change in County Executive administration. These individuals did not have to go through all the normally required steps to be in non-competitive classified service protected jobs, and the timing of these transfers prior to a new County Executive administration taking office creates the appearance that the decision was politically motivated; and
- The County needs to strengthen its workforce planning in order to meet its strategic objectives of providing needed services to County residents. Workforce planning is the process of identifying an organization's human resource requirements and developing plans to ensure that those requirements are satisfied. Auditors noted that the Office of Human Resources did not have programs in place for workforce planning or succession planning.

Among other recommendations:

- The audit recommends that the Office of Human Resources should develop policies and procedures for monitoring departments' compliance with the Nassau County Code of Ethics requirements regarding nepotism, including the hiring and supervision of relatives;
- The Office should prepare and adopt a detailed background check policy, and ensure that it is applied consistently, without excluding specific individuals;

- Work with professional organizations to receive training on workforce planning and succession training; conduct an analysis of County departments and consider implementing a strategic plan for the continued modernization and development of the County's workforce including addressing skill gaps, staffing, workforce planning and training; and
- The Office should establish policies and procedures for detecting possible nepotism in hiring decisions, such as developing a questionnaire for job applicants to disclose relatives and friends who work for Nassau County.

The full list of findings and recommendations are available in the [full audit](#).

Part III of the audit series is focused on the Nassau County Civil Service Commission, which is charged with ensuring a qualified public workforce pursuant to the principles of selection according to merit and fitness.

Among other findings:

- Although substantial improvements were made during the audit, the website of the Civil Service Commission lacked pertinent information that would be helpful for the public, including meeting agendas, links and Resolutions. A transparent website is a key tool in informing the public as to employment opportunities with the County and ensuring that all interested qualified people in the County are aware of such opportunities.
- The Civil Service Commission needs to authorize changes to job qualifications uniformly to expand recruitment efforts, such as allowing college students to take a Civil Service exam before graduating from college;
- Many Nassau County job titles and salary ranges have not been surveyed and updated in over 24 years;
- The audit also found that the Civil Service Commission granted extended leaves of absence to certain exempt County and Town employees without justification, giving the appearance of favoritism/nepotism; and
- The process for creating and updating job specifications lacked needed internal controls which resulted in approval conflicts and an insufficient audit trail.

Among other recommendations:

- The audit recommended that the Nassau County Civil Service Commission should update their website to include features present on the New York State Civil Service website such as Eligible Lists, Internship availability and test guides;
- The Commission should contact all County Departments to determine if a qualification modification would improve recruitment for any other positions;
- Nassau County Civil Service Commission consider performing a Title Classification and Compensation study;
- The Civil Service Commission should consult with colleagues from other counties regarding best practices in dealing with extended leaves of absences and consider a modification to the Civil Service Rules; and

- Job specification revisions or additions should be properly documented as to the reason why the specification is being changed so that it does not give the appearance of accommodating an individual or group of individuals.

“The Civil Service Commission is our first line of defense in ensuring that our County workforce is merit-based. It’s not merely about who you know, but what you know, and how we can best serve the public,” continued **Schnirman**. “Going forward, I am calling for all colleges in Nassau County to receive updates to the civil service website on a regular basis. If all college graduates knew the opportunities that they could have working in the civil service system, it would help modernize our workforce and encourage the next generation to stay in our region. And let’s make sure that when the County needs the Civil Service Commission to create a job specification, the focus should be on the needs of the County for the position, not on which person is already in mind to hire. As Nassau County legend Theodore Roosevelt understood, a merit-based civil service system is essential for a strong government. We need to pick up that mantle and do so in a way that creates the modern workforce we need to deliver the services our residents expect and deserve.”

The full list of findings and recommendations are available in the [full audit](#).

The Comptroller’s Office additionally undertook a review of the Civil Service Commission’s role in ensuring diversity in the recruitment and hiring of police officers. According to the findings of this review, the work performed by the Civil Service Commission with regard to the recruitment and hiring for the Nassau County Police Department was found to be professional and was conducted in accordance with New York State Civil Service Law. However, the audit found that it appears that background tests place little emphasis on emotional intelligence, empathy and communication skills. Some larger cities, such as Baltimore and Washington D.C., test for interpersonal skills early in the recruitment process and such testing can have a major effect on police reform. It is important to police recruitment that tests are administered in a way that is free of subjectivity and unconscious bias in order to avoid inequitable results.

“We undertook a first-of-its-kind initiative like this, looking at favoritism and nepotism, guided by the standards of the Governmental Accountability Office (GAO) because people ought to be confident in their government, that they are getting the services they are entitled to from a qualified workforce. I applaud our Auditors for meeting the challenge in an innovative way,” concluded **Schnirman**. “If the Board of Ethics, Office of Human Resources, and the Civil Service Commission all act in a fair, equitable and consistent manner in the hiring process, we can restore the confidence of the people of Nassau County and eliminate the perception of unfairness, favoritism or nepotism in the hiring process.”

In addition to these reviews, an additional segment of the anti-nepotism audit is underway, reviewing Nassau Community College.

To read the full audits, visit <https://www.nassaucountyny.gov/Audits>.

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