



Zee Almutairi, Interim Director of Compliance (DOC) for the Cook County Assessor's Office (AO), respectfully submits this Semi-Annual Report pursuant to Section V(B) of the [Employment Plan](#). As required, this Semi-Annual report will also be posted and made publicly available on the AO's [website](#).

I. Introduction

This Semi-Annual Report covers compliance activities at the AO from March 1, 2024 through August 31, 2024. The DOC's role is to ensure compliance with the Employment Plan and Employee Handbook and that Unlawful Political Discrimination does not occur in any employment actions or practices except as permitted for exempt positions.¹

Some element of activity occurred in 20 hiring sequences for *Shakman*-covered positions during this reporting period, including filling the DOC position. Under the current administration there have been no findings of unlawful political discrimination, nor has the DOC conducted any investigations during this period. Finally, there have been no reports by the OIIG involving AO staff in conjunction with any Shakman-related allegations.

II. Reporting and Collaboration

A. Periodic Reports and Standing Meetings

The DOC submits monthly reports to the Assessor and key personnel at the AO outlining compliance activities, recommendations, and corrective action suggestions based on monitoring activities. Additionally, the reports highlight efforts from staff to work collaboratively with the DOC. The concerns raised in these reports are more technical than substantive in nature, and do not risk unlawful political considerations, but do draw attention to recurring issues and suggest the need for ongoing training. The AO issued a revised Employment Plan on 2.1.24, and training will be rolled out during next reporting period for all staff. The DOC was involved with the preparation or review of those training materials.

Various standing meetings between the DOC, Assessor and Deputy Assessor as well as the Deputy of HR and Legal address any compliance concerns or initiatives related to the Plan and Handbook. Revisions to the Handbook are underway in the hope of rolling out sections as they are completed during the next quarter. The DOC meets bi-monthly with Supervisors to collaborate and discuss various compliance topics that may warrant attention, respond to questions, and provide an opportunity for HR to provide guidance on these topics as well.

B. Hiring Status

There are 5 Senior HR Generalists, a Director of Human Resources, a Director of Recruitment, and a Director

¹Monitoring activities were completed by the prior DOC, Elizabeth Oplawski, as well as the Interim DOC, and the Compliance Analyst, during this reporting period.



of Learning and Development who complement the hiring process, as well as additional HR staff. This staff perform the work of hiring sequences and onboarding, discipline related investigations as well as other tasks. The Generalists provide an opportunity for more simultaneous hiring sequences to be conducted and is reflected by the number of hiring sequences active during this reporting period. Intake Meetings are more streamlined yet provide an opportunity to discuss minimum and preferred qualifications in the position descriptions, interview questions, and scheduling. Familiarity with hiring process by all staff results in efficient discussions of key topics for a final check between HR and the hiring department and an opportunity to better manage expectations during the process.

C. *Performance Management*

The 2024 annual performance evaluation cycle began on September 1, and will conclude on December 15, 2024. The app continues to be a helpful tool to complete this process, as well as the 90 and 180-day evaluations; updates to the programming continues to provide operational benefits. The timing of assessment and appeal work in the office continues to impact timely completion of the evaluations despite best efforts, and can be overwhelming for the deputy of larger departments when they are not prepared on a rolling schedule over the 90-day window for completion. The 2023 cycle demonstrated the need for annual refresher training to discuss app updates, technical self-help, and provide content guidance. While this brief meeting may seem unnecessary there are always staff new to the Supervisory role, and this provides an opportunity for discussion and feedback with the goal of a smooth process, timely completion and eliminate technical errors. During the 2023 cycle, HR's responsibility for front-line procedural performance as well as departmental performance identified the benefit of office-wide preparation.

III. **Role of the DOC**

The DOC's primary responsibilities are outlined in Article V of the Plan and are carried out by meeting with the Assessor and key staff regarding each of these duties as appropriate. The high-level responsibilities include, but are not limited to, the following categories:

- A. *Understanding the Assessor's Office's organization, its business, operational objectives and needs, and its staffing needs*
- B. *Overseeing Compliance with Employee Handbook Policies*, with main topics including:
 1. Handbook Revisions – this task is ongoing but will be finished shortly
 2. Time and Attendance – this is included in the Handbook revisions.
 3. Discipline – enhanced processes through Handbook are designed to bring about more efficient processes. Of the disciplinary matters, no compliance concerns were raised.
 4. Notices of Employment Action – timely received documentation of employment actions
 5. Grievances – monitored by DOC as appropriate and raise no compliance concerns



C. *Actively working with the Deputy of HR in developing strategies for the Plan as well as necessary Policies and Procedures to ensure compliance with the Plan.*

1. Preparations for training for the 2024 Plan revisions occurred during this reporting period. The revisions focused minor revisions to the hiring processes to realize more robust candidate pools and ranking lists for more efficient hiring as needs arise.
2. Updating the Handbook is underway.

D. *Accepting, Investigating, and reporting on complaints related to the Employment Plan.*

There were no investigations conducted by the DOC involving allegations of Plan violations during this reporting period. There have been no referrals to the OIIG from a *Shakman* perspective and I am unaware if the OIIG has initiated any investigations related to the AO.

E. *Reviewing Position Descriptions and Notices of Job Opportunities and taking appropriate steps to assure their accuracy.*

1. Position Descriptions reflect greater consistencies across the AO related to salary, and minimum/preferred qualifications.
2. HR can increase guidance to Deputies, particularly those new(er) in their role to ensure this process brings about hiring efficiencies, improved validation, and ensure office-wide consistencies prior to presenting them for review by the DOC.

F. *Working with HR to implement training programs, prepare training materials, and conduct training for all employees on the Employment Plan and other policies.*

1. Updated Plan training occurred during this reporting period and no substantial compliance concerns were noted.
2. Reporting on training activities continues to be timely.

G. *Making recommendations to the Assessor and Department heads to eliminate and remedy instances of noncompliance with the Employment Plan, and Unlawful Political Discrimination or Unlawful Political Contact.*

During this reporting period, none of the issues that came to the DOC's attention or that were reported by the DOC rose to the level of unlawful political discrimination or unlawful political contact. The standard is not perfection but rather constitutionally adequate, and the AO continue to meet that standard. The DOC communicates ways to improve compliance for AO staff in various employment actions.



H. *Monitoring activities pertaining to the employment of Shakman covered positions, including but not limited to, participating in validation, interviews, and candidate selection meetings.*

1. General Hiring Process

The DOC monitored activity in 17 General Hiring processes, some that began during the last reporting period or involved the selection of additional Candidates from Ranking List or the Validated Eligibility List for interviews. In addition, there were 3 Actively Recruited hiring processes as well as the beginning of the DOC hiring process. In support of this activity, the DOC monitored over 150 interviews, as well as reviewed the tabulation scoresheets, and monitored the Ranking Meetings. Several other hiring sequences involved offers to Candidates from the Ranking List. On average, hiring sequences were completed in 92 days from the job posting to the Candidate onboarding date. Union challenges related to hiring sequences highlights the need to carefully balance the obligations under the CBA alongside those under the Employment Plan. None of the comments in this report give rise to *Shakman*-level concerns but reflect technical issues for which staff needs to be alert, most notably in applying information from the Intake Meeting regarding the Minimum Qualifications (MQs) to the validation process. Improvements in that regard have been noted during the validation meetings between HR and the DOC as evidenced by fewer instances where HR and the DOC reach different conclusions regarding MQs and PQs when separately reviewing submittals.

- a. TPI Specialist II: This is an entry level position at the Assessor's Office and as such has a regular need for new hires.² A new hiring sequence to fill 5 positions began in February 2024 and advertised a language preference for Spanish and Polish. The first group of Candidates were interviewed and onboarded in mid-June and late July. One Candidate remains on the Ranking List, and an offer was extended and accepted. A second round of interviews from the Candidates on the Validated Eligibility List were conducted to fill an additional 6 vacancies. Offers were extended and accepted with onboarding during the next reporting period. While there were no substantial compliance concerns with this process, the frequency of hiring for this sequence warrants a greater efficiency in the hiring process.
- b. Residential Group Leader: The majority of work for this sequence occurred during the last reporting period. The offer and onboarding of the successful Candidate was completed by late March 2024. There were no substantial compliance concerns.
- c. Graphic Designer: This hiring sequence began during the last reporting period, however interviews, ranking, selection and on-boarding began during this reporting period. The interviews included a question regarding the Candidates' portfolio pieces, and HR worked with IT and Compliance to design a rubric to assist with scoring. There were no substantial compliance concerns with this sequence, and the successful Candidate began on April 22, 2024.

² As an entry level position, employees frequently utilize their experience to move into other positions within the AO resulting in a need for frequent new hires.



- d. Industrial Commercial Junior Analyst: This hiring sequence began during the last reporting period to fill 4 vacancies. The posting, validation and interviews posed no substantial concerns. However, the Ranking Meeting was reconvened at the DOC's direction to ensure the panel members made objective ranking decisions that aligned with the MQs. While the notes from the initial ranking meeting may not have clearly conveyed the objective bases for ranking decisions, the reconvened meeting demonstrated thoughtful reasons for their decisions. Offers were extended to fill the 4 vacancies and 2 candidates began on July 1 and the other 2 began on July 15, 2024. Though this sequence was ultimately successful, HR and Compliance must ensure discussions and ranking selection include objective bases for ranking that also align with the position description and responses to the interview questions.
- e. Residential Junior Analyst: This hiring sequence began in March 2024 to fill 6 vacancies. There were no substantive issues with the sequence. However, the DOC recommended last minute revisions to the interview questions to ensure they aligned with the MQs of the position. Six Candidates accepted offers with 3 beginning on June 3 and 3 beginning on June 17, 2024.
- f. Residential Field Inspector III: A vacancy for a Residential Field Inspector III position occurred when an employee retired on June 28, 2024. HR filled the vacancy by pulling from the Ranking List from the 2023 Residential Field Inspector III hiring sequence. There were no issues with that sequence, and there are no issues noted from this hire from the Ranking List.
- g. Assistant Manager TPI: This hiring sequence began in July 2024 and posed no substantive issues through the initial offer. Compliance raised a question regarding compensation for bilingual ability, which Legal ultimately addressed.
- h. ABL Specialist: This hiring sequence began with an Intake Meeting during the last reporting period. The sequence proceeded without any substantial compliance concerns. The successful Candidate began on April 8, 2024.
- i. Assistant Manager Commercial Data Collection: This hiring sequence filled 2 vacancies on May 6, 2024. The Intake Meeting, interviews and Ranking Meeting proceeded with no substantial compliance concerns. The successful Candidate began on May 6, 2024.
- j. Assistant Manager Residential Data Collection: This hiring sequence filled 1 position on May 20, 2024. The Intake Meeting, interviews and Ranking Meeting proceeded with no substantial compliance concerns. The successful Candidate started May 20, 2024.
- k. Community Outreach Liaison: This hiring sequence began with a posting in March 2024, after the 2023 posting did not result in any successful Candidates. While there were no substantial concerns with this sequence, a brief Intake Meeting to discuss processes and scheduling could have assisted in this sequence moving forward more efficiently and concisely. Due to scheduling conflicts of the panel members, interviews did not take place for over a month after the posting closed. Additionally, several Candidates declined with short notice or failed to appear for their interview.



While this issue is not a substantial concern, the panel did not interview a full slate. Greater efficiency in scheduling based on known conflicts could have avoided this situation. That said, the successful Candidate accepted the offer and begin on July 15, 2024. .

- l. Taxpayer Resolution Specialist: This hiring sequence began and was concluded within this reporting period in less than 90 days. There were no substantial compliance concerns throughout the process. The successful Candidate began on June 17, 2024.
- m. Division Analyst: This hiring sequence, to fill 3 vacancies, began and was concluded within this reporting period in less than 90 days. There were no substantial compliance concerns throughout the process. The successful Candidates began in July 2024.
- n. Permit Specialist: This hiring sequence, to fill 2 vacancies, began and was concluded within this reporting period in less than 90 days. There were no substantial compliance concerns throughout the process. The successful Candidates began on July 29, 2024.
- o. IC Group Leader/Sr Field Inspector: This hiring sequence began and was concluded during this reporting period. There were no substantial compliance concerns throughout the process. The successful Candidate began on August 26, 2024.
- p. Erroneous Exemption Specialist – Finance: This hiring sequence began and was concluded during this reporting period. There were no substantial compliance concerns throughout the process. The successful Candidate will begin during the next reporting period.

2. Actively Recruited positions:

- a. Manager of Computer Assisted Mass Appraisal: The position posted in January, 2024, and concluded with the hire beginning on March 25, 2024. There were no substantial compliance concerns.
- b. Data Architect: This hiring sequence began in May with an Intake Meeting and was concluded within this reporting period. There were no substantial compliance concerns throughout the process. Only one person was selected to interview. The interviewee was not ranked and, thus, no offer extended. This position will be reposted during the next reporting period.

3. Exempt Hiring

Exempt positions and links to the position descriptions are maintained on the CCAO's website. The DOC reviews the resume and position descriptions to ensure the individual meets the minimum qualifications. No exempt positions were filled during this reporting period. The following exempt positions were filled during this reporting period with no substantial compliance concerns.

4. DOC Hiring



- a. This process began in July after the prior DOC retired effective June 28, 2024. No substantial compliance concerns have occurred yet. The hiring process for this position will conclude during the next reporting period.

IV. Requirements of this Semi-annual Report.

Section V(B) of the Employment Plan requires that this semi-annual report include consideration of the following: (i) auditing activities as required by the Plan; (ii) discovered violations of the Employment Plan or policies in the Employee Handbook referenced in this Plan; (iii) complaints of Unlawful Political Considerations in Employment Actions referred to the OIIG; (iv) remedial actions recommended; and (v) corrective actions taken by the Assessor's Office to address the violations.

A. Auditing activities

The prior DOC focused monitoring on real time activities rather than auditing during this period. Overtime is audited on a bi-weekly basis and substantially compliant. Additional staffing will hopefully bring about reduced overtime needs. Time and Attendance is periodically reviewed, and any concerns raised are resolved. It is anticipated that the same real time monitoring will continue, but with revisions to the Handbook auditing for Time and Attendance as well as Overtime will likely be implemented.

B. Discovered violations of the Employment Plan

There have been no substantiated complaints of unlawful political discrimination during this reporting period. Efficiencies and improvements continue throughout the AO. The DOC remains an active monitor, and identifies compliance issues, none of which amount have amounted to constitutional violations this reporting period.

The probationary evaluations (90- and 180-day) experienced untimely completion despite enhanced notice to Supervisors. Better understanding of the process should be addressed by HR through the updated training.

The quality of disciplinary processes, investigations and the imposition of discipline is generally compliant. Completion time for investigations has been reduced as well for the most part. However, there have been some investigations that took longer to complete. There was one investigation that resulted in termination during this period, and thus, was more time consuming due to the serious nature of the infractions.

C. Complaints of UPD referred to the OIIG

There were no referrals to the OIIG during this reporting period.

D. Remedial Actions Recommended

Recommendations continue to be discussed when noted and implemented as appropriate.

E. Corrective actions taken



There were no significant remedial recommendations, thus no specific corrective actions are reported.

Conclusion

The issues noted in this report do not rise to the level of unlawful political discrimination which continues to show the Assessor's commitment along with the leadership of the office. There remains room for improvement from a technical perspective and the DOC works with staff to streamline processes for improved accuracy and efficiency. This is accomplished by open dialogue with the DOC and the Compliance Analyst, and the opportunity to listen, discuss, and implement agreed upon recommendations. This demonstrates a professional and effective working relationship within the CCAO to ensure compliance with the Assessor's Employment Plan and Employee Handbook.

Respectfully submitted,

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