

**ATTESTATION REPORT
OF
BUFFALO COUNTY COURT**

JANUARY 1, 2020, THROUGH DECEMBER 31, 2021

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Issued on June 24, 2022

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Audit Staff Working On This Examination

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BUFFALO COUNTY COURT

TABLE OF CONTENTS

	<u>Page</u>
<u>Comment Section</u>	
Comment and Recommendation	1
<u>Financial Section</u>	
Independent Accountant's Report	2 - 3
Financial Schedules:	
Schedule of Changes in Assets and Liabilities Arising from Cash Transactions - Custodial Funds - For the Calendar Year Ended December 31, 2021	4
Schedule of Changes in Assets and Liabilities Arising from Cash Transactions - Custodial Funds - For the Calendar Year Ended December 31, 2020	5
Notes to Financial Schedules	6

BUFFALO COUNTY COURT

COMMENT AND RECOMMENDATION

During our examination of the Buffalo County Court, we noted a certain deficiency that is presented here. The following comment is required to be reported in accordance with *Government Auditing Standards* and is considered to be a material weakness.

This comment and recommendation is intended to improve the internal control over financial reporting or result in operational efficiencies in the following area:

Segregation of Duties

Good internal control includes a plan of organization, procedures, and documentation designed to safeguard assets and to provide reliable financial records. A system of internal control should include a proper segregation of duties, so no one individual is capable of handling all phases of a transaction from beginning to end.

We noted that the office of the County Court lacked a sufficient segregation of duties, as one person was capable of handling all aspects of processing transactions from beginning to end. Additionally, staff could create and issue orders affixed with the Judge's signature in the JUSTICE (Judicial User System to Improve Court Efficiency) application without formal documentation to support that the Judge approved the order. That same staff had access to court receipts and were able to record non-monetary transactions (e.g., waiving fines) in JUSTICE.

A lack of segregation of duties increases the risk of possible errors or irregularities; however, due to a limited number of personnel, an adequate segregation of duties may not be possible without additional cost. Further, personnel are under the direction of both the Nebraska State Court Administrator and the Presiding Judge. We have included this comment in previous examinations.

We recommend the County Court and the Nebraska State Court Administrator review this situation. As always, the cost of hiring additional personnel versus the benefit of a proper segregation of duties must be weighed. We also recommend the Supreme Court implement procedures to ensure that each Judge's approval of orders is formally documented.

County Court's Response: The Administrative Office of the Courts and Probation (AOCP) accepts that there is a risk from one person having the authority to initiate and complete financial transactions. To reduce the risk of improper transactions, court financial specialists review court records and provide assistance to county courts if there are discrepancies. However, the Judicial Branch does not have the financial and human resources to mitigate all risks related to segregation of duties sufficient to meet current audit guidelines. As a result, in order to fulfill all statutory obligations, the AOCP has determined that all clerk magistrates will have the authority to operate all financial functions of a court.

It should be noted this report is critical in nature, as it contains only our comment and recommendation on the area noted for improvement and does not include our observations on any accounting strengths of the County Court.

Draft copies of this report were furnished to the County Court to provide management an opportunity to review the report and to respond to the comment and recommendation included in this report. The formal response received has been incorporated into this report. The response has been objectively evaluated and recognized, as appropriate, in the report. A response that indicates corrective action has been taken was not verified at this time, but it will be verified in the next examination.



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BUFFALO COUNTY COURT

INDEPENDENT ACCOUNTANT'S REPORT

Buffalo County Court
Kearney, Nebraska 68847

We have examined the accompanying Schedules of Changes in Assets and Liabilities Arising from Cash Transactions of the Buffalo County Court as of and for the calendar years ending December 31, 2020, and December 31, 2021. The County Court's management is responsible for the Schedules of Changes in Assets and Liabilities Arising from Cash Transactions based on the accounting system and procedures set forth in Note 1. Our responsibility is to express an opinion on the Schedules of Changes in Assets and Liabilities Arising from Cash Transactions based on our examination.

Our examination was conducted in accordance with attestation standards established by the American Institute of Certified Public Accountants and the standards applicable to attestation engagements contained in *Government Auditing Standards* issued by the Comptroller General of the United States. Those standards require that we plan and perform the examination to obtain reasonable assurance about whether the Schedules of Changes in Assets and Liabilities Arising from Cash Transactions are based on the accounting system and procedures set forth in Note 1, in all material respects. An examination involves performing procedures to obtain evidence about the Schedules of Changes in Assets and Liabilities Arising from Cash Transactions. The nature, timing, and extent of the procedures selected depend on our judgment, including an assessment of the risks of material misstatement of the Schedules of Changes in Assets and Liabilities Arising from Cash Transactions, whether due to fraud or error. We believe that the evidence we obtained is sufficient and appropriate to provide a reasonable basis for our opinion.

In our opinion, the Schedules of Changes in Assets and Liabilities Arising from Cash Transactions for the calendar years ending December 31, 2020, and December 31, 2021, are based on the accounting system and procedures prescribed by the Nebraska Supreme Court, as set forth in Note 1, in all material respects.

In accordance with *Government Auditing Standards*, we are required to report all deficiencies that are considered to be significant deficiencies or material weaknesses in internal control; noncompliance with provisions of laws, regulations, contracts, or grant agreements that have a material effect on the Schedules of Changes in Assets and Liabilities Arising from Cash Transactions; fraud that is material, either quantitatively or qualitatively, to the Schedules of Changes in Assets and Liabilities Arising from Cash Transactions; and any other instances that warrant the attention of those charged with governance. We are also required to obtain and report the views of management concerning the findings, conclusions, and recommendations, as well as any planned corrective actions. We performed our examination to express an opinion on whether the Schedules of Changes in Assets and Liabilities Arising from Cash Transactions are presented in accordance with the criteria described above and not for the purpose of expressing an opinion on the internal control over the Schedules of Changes in Assets and Liabilities Arising from Cash Transactions or on compliance and other matters; accordingly, we express no such opinions. Our examination disclosed a certain finding that is required to be reported under *Government Auditing Standards*, and that finding, along with the views of management, is described in the Comment Section of the report.

The purpose of this report is to express an opinion on the Schedules of Changes in Assets and Liabilities Arising from Cash Transactions, as described in paragraph one above. Accordingly, this report is not suitable for any other purpose. This report is a matter of public record, and its distribution is not limited.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "C. Janssen", with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

June 22, 2022

Charlie Janssen
Auditor of Public Accounts
Lincoln, Nebraska

BUFFALO COUNTY COURT
 KEARNEY, NEBRASKA
SCHEDULE OF CHANGES IN ASSETS AND LIABILITIES
ARISING FROM CASH TRANSACTIONS
CUSTODIAL FUNDS

For the Calendar Year Ended December 31, 2021

	Balance January 1, 2021	Additions	Deductions	Balance December 31, 2021
ASSETS				
Cash and Deposits	\$ 232,343	\$ 2,249,656	\$ 2,208,326	\$ 273,673
LIABILITIES				
Due to State Treasurer:				
Regular Fees	\$ 11,239	\$ 158,310	\$ 155,628	\$ 13,921
Law Enforcement Fees	1,265	15,835	15,841	1,259
State Judges Retirement Fund	6,780	90,467	88,504	8,743
Court Administrative Fees	6,802	86,019	85,008	7,813
Legal Services Fees	5,441	65,789	65,644	5,586
Due to County Treasurer:				
Regular Fines	33,613	455,739	457,434	31,918
Overload Fines	-	900	225	675
Regular Fees	2,328	42,728	39,751	5,305
Petty Cash Fund	450	-	-	450
Municipality Fines	715	17,659	18,009	365
Due to Municipalities:				
Regular Fees	-	-	-	-
Trust Fund Payable	163,710	1,316,210	1,282,282	197,638
Total Liabilities	\$ 232,343	\$ 2,249,656	\$ 2,208,326	\$ 273,673

The accompanying notes are an integral part of the schedule.

BUFFALO COUNTY COURT
KEARNEY, NEBRASKA
SCHEDULE OF CHANGES IN ASSETS AND LIABILITIES
ARISING FROM CASH TRANSACTIONS
CUSTODIAL FUNDS

For the Calendar Year Ended December 31, 2020

	Balance January 1, 2020	Additions	Deductions	Balance December 31, 2020
ASSETS				
Cash and Deposits	\$ 286,147	\$ 1,840,586	\$ 1,894,390	\$ 232,343
LIABILITIES				
Due to State Treasurer:				
Regular Fees	\$ 14,972	\$ 153,295	\$ 157,028	\$ 11,239
Law Enforcement Fees	1,381	15,340	15,456	1,265
State Judges Retirement Fund	7,586	81,186	81,992	6,780
Court Administrative Fees	7,226	86,005	86,429	6,802
Legal Services Fees	6,061	64,401	65,021	5,441
Due to County Treasurer:				
Regular Fines	32,506	387,764	386,657	33,613
Overload Fines	500	7,600	8,100	-
Regular Fees	3,931	32,650	34,253	2,328
Petty Cash Fund	450	-	-	450
Municipality Fines	1,359	13,754	14,398	715
Due to Municipalities:				
Regular Fees	-	25	25	-
Trust Fund Payable	210,175	998,566	1,045,031	163,710
Total Liabilities	\$ 286,147	\$ 1,840,586	\$ 1,894,390	\$ 232,343

The accompanying notes are an integral part of the schedule.

BUFFALO COUNTY COURT
NOTES TO FINANCIAL SCHEDULES

For the Calendar Years Ending December 31, 2020, and December 31, 2021

1. Criteria

A. Reporting Entity

The Buffalo County Court is established by State statute and is administratively operated through the Court Administrator's Office of the Nebraska Supreme Court, which is part of the State of Nebraska reporting entity. The Schedules of Changes in Assets and Liabilities Arising from Cash Transactions of the County Court reflect only the Custodial Funds activity of the County Court, including the receipts and their subsequent disbursement to the appropriate entities for which they were collected. The Schedules do not reflect the personal services expenses of the County Court, which are paid by the Nebraska Supreme Court, or the operating expenses, which are paid by Buffalo County.

B. Basis of Accounting

The accounting records of the County Court Custodial Funds are maintained, and the Schedules of Changes in Assets and Liabilities Arising from Cash Transactions have been prepared, based on the accounting system and procedures prescribed by the Nebraska Supreme Court. Under this system of accounting, fines, fees, and receipts relating to trust funds are shown as additions to assets and as an increase in the related liability when received or collected. Likewise, disbursements are shown as deductions to assets and as a decrease in the related liability when a check is written.

2. Deposits and Investments

Funds held by the County Court are deposited and invested in accordance with rules issued by the Supreme Court, as directed by Neb. Rev. Stat. § 25-2713 (Reissue 2016). Funds are generally consolidated in an interest-bearing checking account; however, the County Court may order certain trust funds to be invested separately. Any deposits in excess of the amount insured by the Federal Deposit Insurance Corporation are required by Neb. Rev. Stat. § 77-2326.04 (Reissue 2018) to be secured either by a surety bond or as provided in the Public Funds Deposit Security Act.