



State of Louisiana

**OFFICE OF
STATE INSPECTOR GENERAL**

MINDEN PROBATION AND PAROLE

MISUSE OF STATE VEHICLE

Report by

Inspector General Bill Lynch

Prepared for

Governor M.J. "Mike" Foster, Jr.

July 11, 2002

File No. 1-02-0087



State of Louisiana

OFFICE OF
STATE INSPECTOR GENERAL

Minden Probation and Parole

Misuse of State Vehicle

Report by

BL Inspector General Bill Lynch

Approved by

MF Governor M.J. "Mike" Foster, Jr.

June 24, 2002

File No. 1-02-0087

Minden Probation and Parole Misuse of State Vehicle

Kenneth Pickett, the district administrator for the Minden District Office of Adult Probation and Parole, used his state car while on annual leave to drive to and from his part-time job, which he has had for the past ten years, exposing the state to unnecessary liability. He was videotaped on six occasions using his state vehicle in such a manner. Mr. Pickett also provided false information on the state vehicle usage logs in accounting for his use of his state car.

Background

The Office of Adult Probation and Parole is within the Department of Public Safety and Corrections. The Minden district office is responsible for the supervision of felony offenders on probation or parole in the parishes of Webster, Claiborne, Bienville and Jackson. Mr. Pickett has been the district administrator for about two years and supervises 10 officers. He is supervised by Gary Wyche, the regional administrator, who investigated this matter jointly with the Office of Inspector General.

As an administrator, Mr. Pickett is assigned exclusive use of a 2000 Ford Crown Victoria. He is approved for home storage, which gives him authority to use his state car to commute between home and work.

For the past ten years, Mr. Pickett has also worked part-time under contract for the district court in Bienville Parish providing supervision of misdemeanor offenders placed on probation by the court. This requires his presence at the Bienville Parish courthouse in Arcadia one day per month for court hearings, and from 8 to 10 a.m. the second and third Sunday of each month.

Misuse of car and inaccurate logs

This office anonymously received a videotape showing Mr. Pickett's state car, on six occasions, parked at the Bienville Parish courthouse. State payroll records show Mr. Pickett was on annual leave on these occasions. The state vehicle usage logs do not accurately reflect Mr. Pickett's use of the car on these occasions.

On four dates, Wednesday, Aug. 1, 2001, Tuesday, Sept. 25, 2001, Wednesday, Jan. 9, 2002, and Wednesday, Feb. 6, 2002, Mr. Pickett's state car was parked at the courthouse from about 8 a.m. until noon, according to the videotape. Mr. Pickett admitted using the state car to travel to the courthouse these mornings to handle matters associated with his part-time job. He said he traveled from the courthouse to his state job for the remainder of the workdays.

State payroll records show he was on annual leave for these mornings.

Mr. Pickett attested on the state vehicle usage logs that he used his state car these dates to travel from Arcadia, where he lives, to work at his state job, then back to Arcadia. The roundtrip distance between the courthouse and Mr. Pickett's regular route from his home to the office is about two miles. The two additional miles were not accurately reflected on the state vehicle usage logs.

On two other dates, Wednesday, March 6, 2002, and Wednesday, April 3, 2002, Mr. Pickett's state car was parked at the courthouse during the morning hours, according to the videotape. Mr. Pickett admitted using the state car to travel to the courthouse on the first date, but said he did not remember using the state car on the second date.

State payroll records show he was on annual leave all day, both days.

The state vehicle usage logs do not show any use of his state car either day. Mr. Pickett admitted that relative to the first date, he incorporated the mileage associated with his personal use of the state car into the mileage of the next entry on the log, making that entry false. However, the amount of mileage was negligible, he said. The roundtrip distance between Mr. Pickett's home and the courthouse is about eight miles.

Since Mr. Pickett was not on state duty when he used the state vehicle to travel to and from his part-time job, this exposed the state to unnecessary liability.

According to Probation and Parole management, state vehicles shall be used for official business only.

State travel policy prohibits personal use of state vehicles.

According to the document which gives Mr. Pickett personal assignment of and authority to commute in his state car, Mr. Pickett acknowledged by his signature that the assigned state vehicle “shall not be used for personal purposes.”

La. R.S. 42:1461 requires any public employee to “assume a personal obligation not to misappropriate, misapply, convert, misuse, or otherwise wrongfully take any funds, property, or other thing of value belonging to or under the custody or control of the public entity in which they hold office or are employed.”

State law prohibits providing false information on a public document.

Mr. Pickett admitted it was improper for him to use the state vehicle in such a manner and to provide inaccurate information on the state vehicle usage log.

Mr. Wyche, the regional administrator, said Mr. Pickett misused the state vehicle, and appropriate action would be taken.

Conclusions:

1. Minden Probation and Parole District Administrator Kenneth Pickett used a state vehicle as personal transportation to and from his part-time job while on annual leave. State law and state travel policy prohibit such personal use of a state vehicle.
2. Mr. Pickett included false information on the state vehicle usage log (Form MV-3), which is prohibited by state law and state travel policy.
3. Mr. Pickett was not on duty, but was on annual leave when he used the state vehicle to travel to and from his part-time job, which exposed the state to unnecessary liability.

Recommendations:

2. Management at Probation and Parole should take appropriate action concerning Mr. Pickett's misuse of the state vehicle and inaccurate accounting of the usage.
3. Management at Probation and Parole should ensure that all agency employees comply with state law, state travel policy and agency policy relative to the use of state vehicles.

Response:

A response from Probation and Parole Director Eugenie C. Powers is attached.

BL/JW

File No. 1-02-0087

DEPARTMENT OF
PUBLIC SAFETY AND CORRECTIONS

J. "MIKE" FOSTER, JR., GOVERNOR



RICHARD L. STALDER, SECRETARY

June 20, 2002

MEMORANDUM

TO: Bill Lynch
Inspector General

FROM: Eugenie C. Powers *Eugenie C. Powers*
Director, P&P/Adult

RE: File No. 1-02-0087

Please refer to your draft report concerning Minden District Administrator Kenneth Pickett.

As you state in your report, Mr. Pickett is the District Administrator of the Minden District Office of Probation and Parole, a position he has held for about two years. He is assigned a 2000 Ford Crown Victoria. He is employed under part-time contract by the district court in Bienville Parish as a misdemeanor probation officer, a job which was approved by a previous Director ten years ago.

The Secretary of Public Safety and Corrections' Office also received anonymously the videotape which your office received. That tape was forwarded to me for review. After viewing the tape, I immediately assigned the investigation to Regional Director Gary Wyche. As you note, Mr. Wyche was in Minden district the same day as your investigator, Mr. Wilsford.

After reviewing the information, travel logs and leave slips, as well as interviewing Mr. Pickett, Mr. Wyche determined that there was misuse of the state vehicle and inaccurate travel logs filed.

Be assured that these findings concern me, especially due to Mr. Pickett's position of authority and leadership in that office. As a result of the findings, appropriate disciplinary action will be taken regarding Mr. Pickett and, although I believe this is an isolated incident, agency employees will be reminded about travel policy regarding the use of state vehicles.

ECP/DF/dgr