

Looking for a Good Posse

In its July 2 editorial, the Tribune reminded its readers of the opportunities that exist for further anticorruption reform. The editorial specifically mentioned various tabled recommendations made by Gov. Quinn's reform commission among them one that would expand the powers of inspectors general throughout Illinois. These changes would help ensure that, in the Tribune's words, "the U.S. attorney is not the only sheriff in town."

The metaphor of a sheriff is an apt one. In the Old West, when faced with a shortage of resources the town sheriff and his deputies might call upon a posse composed of ordinary citizens to help round-up the "bad guys." Today, the Illinois General Assembly allocates the resources. In Illinois, the Office of Executive Inspector General for the Agencies of the Illinois Governor (OEIG) is tasked with investigating waste, fraud and abuse relating to the more than 160,000 public employees, appointees and elected officials. As of July 1, 2011, the General Assembly added another 15,000 employees to that mix by giving the OEIG jurisdiction over the four regional transit boards (RTA, CTA, Metra, Pace).

Even before this expansion of jurisdiction, the OEIG's hands were full. In Fiscal Year 2011, the OEIG received over 2,100 allegations of wrongdoing, an increase by over 1,000 allegations from the prior year. Amidst this backdrop, the Illinois General Assembly slashed the OEIG's Fiscal Year 2012 budget by over 17%. While new powers would be welcome, they will be of little solace if the OEIG is too financially constrained to use them. Unlike the Old West, this "sheriff" can't gather a posse; the OEIG has only the resources given to it by the General Assembly. While the OEIG appreciates the financial state of Illinois affairs, we believe reducing resources of an agency whose mission is to reduce waste, fraud and abuse may in fact send Illinois citizens the wrong message.

Sincerely,



Ricardo Meza
Executive Inspector General