

City of Atlanta

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Integrity Line Annual Report
2008

Integrity Line Steering Committee
October 2009

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Executive Summary

The Integrity Line is a telephone hotline for City of Atlanta employees, customers, business partners, and citizens to report unethical, fraudulent, or illegal activity without fear of retaliation. Begun in April 2006, the Integrity Line received over 600 calls through December 2008. In 2008, the Integrity Line received 129 calls, including 121 unduplicated cases, and investigated 47 cases. Allegations were sustained in four cases, resulting in demotion in one case, supervisory counseling in one case, and changes in departmental practices in the two remaining cases. Additionally, one case regarding a contractor was already under investigation by the Atlanta Police Department when the Integrity Line received the call. The Atlanta Police Department subsequently referred the case to the Fulton County District Attorney for prosecution. As in previous years, three-fourths of all calls related to four areas: employee relations, policy issues, customer relations, and theft of time. This report describes the calls received in 2008 and how the city responded to them.

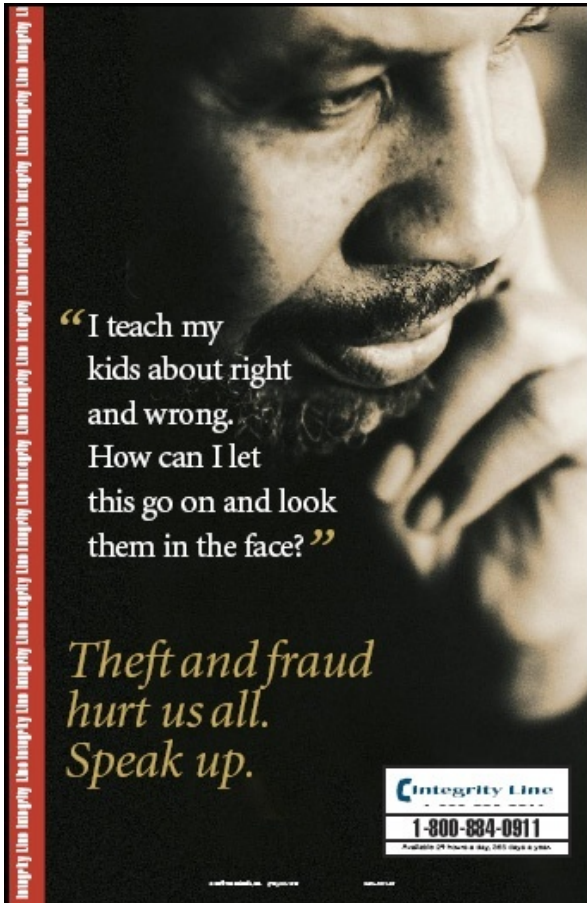
How the Integrity Line Operates

Call Center Available 24/7

The city contracts with an independent company, The Network, to operate the call center 24 hours a day, 365 days a year. When a caller phones the Integrity Line, a professional interviewer gives the caller the option to remain anonymous and documents the caller's concern in detail. Anonymous callers are advised that they may call back with additional information or to answer questions that may arise during an investigation. The Network sends the Integrity Line Steering Committee a written incident report within 24 hours of each call. The report provides the date and time of the call; the name of the caller, if given, and any contact information; the incident type (one of 18 standard codes); the time, place, and description of the incident; the names and titles of reported individuals; and the names and titles of involved parties.

Calls Reviewed Weekly

The steering committee reviews and assigns complaints weekly based on the issue raised and each office's hotline call jurisdiction. Depending on the allegation, the case is referred to the relevant city department; investigated by ethics, audit, or law staff; or closed when the call pertains to a matter outside the city's jurisdiction or duplicates a call already under investigation. The Integrity Line's protocol for assigning cases is described in Appendix 1; Appendix 2 summarizes how calls were handled in 2008. The members of the committee are Deputy City Auditor Amanda Noble, Compliance Manager Jeffrey Norman, and Associate Ethics Officer Jabu Sengova.



City Reinforces Message That Integrity Matters

Communication is critical to the success of any hotline, both in training employees about expected behavior and in explaining when to call the hotline to report unacceptable behavior. The city communicates to employees and to the public that integrity matters in several ways:

- Training new employees on ethics;
- Providing Integrity Line wallet cards to new employees;
- Periodically displaying an Integrity Matters banner with the hotline's toll-free number in the City Hall atrium;
- Printing the message "Integrity Matters" on city employees' paychecks;
- Publishing the Integrity Line's toll-free number (1-800-884-0911) in water bill inserts; and
- Displaying new posters every six months at work sites throughout the city.

More than half of hotline callers in 2008 said that they knew about the hotline from posters or wallet cards.

Types of Calls Largely Unchanged As Call Volume Declined

Volume of Calls Has Dropped

The volume of calls has dropped significantly, from a high of 250 in 2006 when the hotline first started to 129 in 2008. Employees account for most of the complaints; they made two-thirds of the calls in 2008 (88), while members of the general public were responsible for one-third of the calls (41). The majority of the calls (62%) continue to be anonymous, which is substantially higher than The Network's public sector average of 48 percent. While more employees are reporting incidents to management before calling the hotline – 27 percent in 2008 compared to 17 percent in 2006 – this rate is still lower than the Network's public sector average of 31 percent. We encourage employees to report workplace problems to their managers for resolution before calling the hotline.

Half of Hotline Calls Involve Operational Issues

Nearly half of the calls received in 2008 involved employee and customer relations. The subject matter of the majority of calls has remained consistent during the hotline's three years of operation: employee relations, policy issues, customer relations and theft of time. These four types of calls accounted for 78 percent of the unduplicated calls received in 2008. The percentage of customer relations calls has steadily increased from 9 percent in 2006 to 19

percent in 2008. The percentage of complaints about conflicts of interest has decreased from 5 percent to 2 percent during that same period.

Exhibit 1: 2008 Cases by Incident Type

Incident Type	Count*	Percentage
Employee Relations	33	27.3%
Policy Issues	27	22.3%
Customer Relations	23	19.0%
Theft of Time	11	9.1%
Wage/Hour Issues	6	5.0%
Discrimination	5	4.1%
Fraud	4	3.3%
Conflicts of Interest	2	1.7%
Sexual Harassment	2	1.7%
Substance Abuse	2	1.7%
Theft of Goods/Services	2	1.7%
Workplace Violence/Threats	2	1.7%
Retaliation of Whistleblowers	1	0.8%
Theft of Cash	1	0.8%
Accounting/Audit Irregularities	0	0.0%
Falsification of Company Records	0	0.0%
Fraudulent Insurance Claims	0	0.0%
Kickbacks	0	0.0%
Total	121	100.0%
* Excludes duplicate calls		

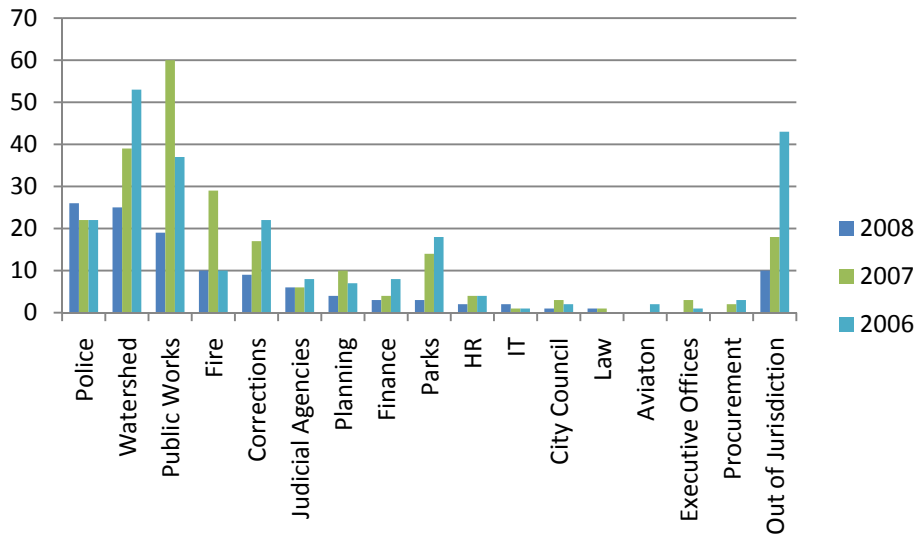
Source: Integrity Line Executive Summary Report from 1.1.08 to 12.31.08

Unlike Most Departments, Hotline Calls about Police Increased in 2008

While the number of calls relating to most departments dropped in 2008 along with the overall decrease in call volume, calls about the Police Department increased. The Integrity Line received 26 unduplicated calls regarding the Police Department in 2008, compared to 22 unduplicated calls in each of 2006 and 2007. Calls about the Police Department comprised 22 percent of all calls received in 2008 compared to 9 percent in 2006. Calls regarding the Department of Parks, Recreation and Cultural Affairs showed the biggest decrease with three calls in 2008 compared to 18 calls in 2006.

Judicial Agencies had the highest number of calls per 100 full time employees (FTEs) in 2008, with 4.7, followed by Human Resources and the Department of Public Works with 3.3 and 2.8, respectively. Integrity Line calls about the Police Department amounted to 1.3 calls per 100 full-time employees in 2008, equal to the citywide average.

Exhibit 2: Hotline Calls By Department 2006-2008



Source: Steering committee reviews

Exhibit 3: 2008 Hotline Calls By Department per 100 Full-Time Employees

Department	2008 Calls	Calls per 100 FTE
Judicial Agencies	6	4.7
Human Resources	2	3.3
Public Works	19	2.8
Planning and Community Development	4	2.3
Information Technology	2	1.9
Watershed Management	25	1.8
Corrections	9	1.7
Finance	3	1.6
Police	26	1.3
City Council	1	1.2
Law	1	1.1
Fire	10	0.6
Parks, Recreation, and Cultural Affairs	3	0.5
Aviation	0	0.0
Executive Offices	0	0.0
Procurement	0	0.0
Citywide Total	111	1.3

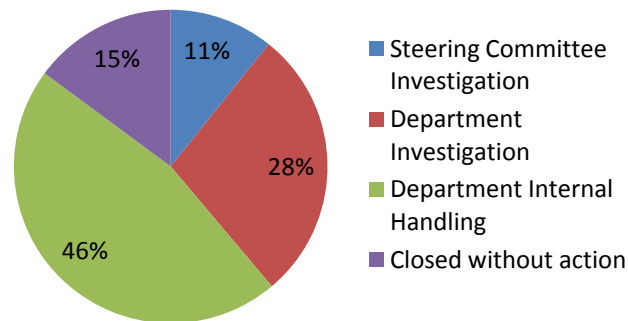
Source: Steering committee reviews and city timekeeping reports

Fewer Cases Warranted Investigation and Fewer Allegations Were Sustained

Fewer Integrity Line calls warranted investigation in 2008 than in prior years and the percentage of investigations that substantiated allegations also dropped. While the city took corrective action in all cases in which allegations were sustained, the types of corrective action were milder than in prior years, raising questions about whether departments apply discipline consistently.

The steering committee retained and investigated 13 of the 121 unduplicated calls received in 2008, referred 34 cases to departments for investigation and a report back, and referred 56 cases to departments for internal review and handling. The committee immediately closed 10 cases that were outside the city's jurisdiction. For example, a citizen called the Integrity Line to complain about a Fulton County judge, which is outside Atlanta's jurisdiction. The caller was referred to the appropriate agency and the case closed without further action. The committee closed an additional seven cases where the caller provided insufficient information to take any action, and closed one case that was already under investigation by another agency. The steering committee closed 117 cases in 2008; 12 continued into 2009, but have since been resolved.

Exhibit 4: How Hotline Cases Were Handled in 2008



Source: Steering committee reviews

Thirty-Four Cases Referred to Departments for Investigation

The steering committee referred 34 cases (28%) to city departments for investigation with a report back to the committee on findings of fact and actions taken. These cases included:

- allegations of theft of time, such as a city employee doing personal laundry during work hours and employees failing to report directly to work after clocking-in;
- allegations of theft of goods or services, such as employees using city equipment to conduct personal business;

- complaints about lack of enforcement of city policies, such as those concerning take home vehicles or nepotism; and
- issues regarding employee relations, such as favoritism in shift assignment, inconsistent discipline, and poor working conditions.

The committee requests departments to report the results of investigations within 30 days. The Law Department has provided departments training on conducting investigations and a template for reporting results to facilitate thorough and timely investigations. However, the median time to complete investigations has increased since 2006 and was in the 61-90 day range in 2008.

Fifty-Six Cases Referred to Departments for Internal Review and Resolution

The steering committee referred 56 cases to city departments without requiring a report back. These cases primarily included operational matters and citizen complaints involving customer relations. For example, an employee with 22 years of service with the city reported that his work shift changed from a day shift to a night shift; he complained that this was unfair because he should have better work hours than his co-workers with fewer years of service.

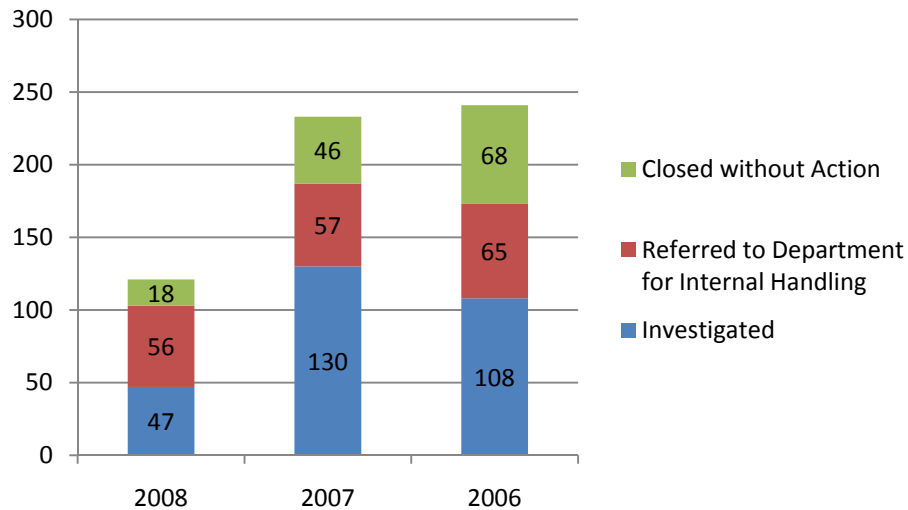
Corrective Action Taken in Four Cases

Allegations were not sustained in 43 of 47 investigations conducted as a result of Integrity Line calls received in 2008; allegations were sustained in four cases, and one case was referred for prosecution. Corrective action was taken in the four cases where allegations were sustained. Corrective action consists of disciplinary action against the employee, changes made to department policies and procedures to prevent the problem from recurring, or termination of the employee if applicable. The four cases in which corrective action was taken include the following:

- A supervisor was allegedly engaging in harassment, inappropriate conduct and use of profanity. The supervisor was required to receive supervisory counseling on proper office etiquette, specifically for her use of profanity, and attend sensitivity training sessions with her staff.
- A caller reported that an employee gave false information on his job application. The employee stated on his job application that he had a license for the position to which he was applying and he was hired for the position. When the investigation uncovered that this license had lapsed, he was demoted.
- An employee was allegedly stealing time by altering her time records when she did not work her entire shift. The department's investigation found that her scheduled work shift was not consistent with her time records. Therefore, the investigator recommended that the employee's time be monitored for a period of six months to ensure that her time records were consistent with her work shift.
- An employee was allegedly hired for a position without having the correct credentials and qualifications. The department determined that the employee had not been properly notified of the required license for the position and allowed the employee six months to obtain the necessary license.

Compared to previous years, the percentage of calls warranting investigation decreased from 45 percent in 2006 to 39 percent in 2008. The percentage of calls referred to departments for internal handling increased from 27 percent in 2006 to 46 percent in 2008. The percentage of calls closed due to lack of jurisdiction or actionable information decreased from 28 percent in 2006 to 15 percent in 2008.

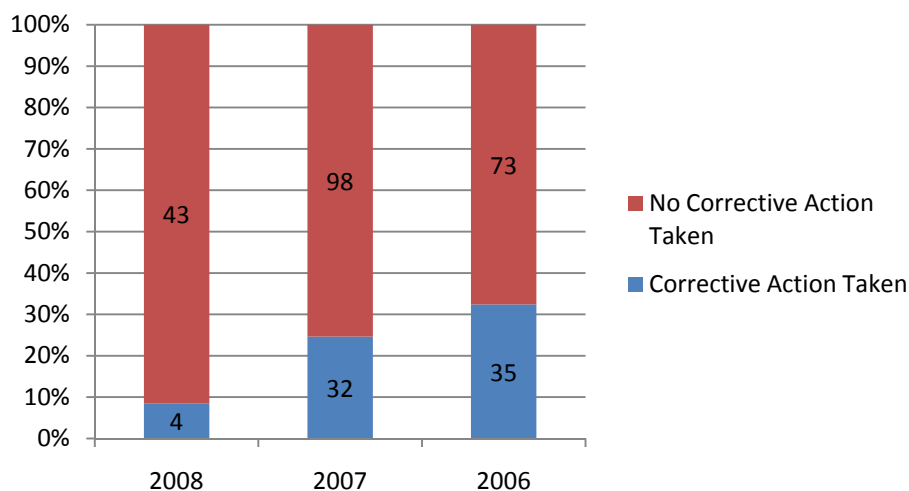
Exhibit 5: Comparison of Call Handling 2006-2008



Source: Integrity Line Resolution Tracking Reports from 2006-2008

Nine percent of investigations in 2008 resulted in corrective action compared to nearly one-third of investigations in 2006 and one-quarter of investigations in 2007. Corrective actions taken as a result of Integrity Line investigations over the past three years have included seven terminations, seven written reprimands, seven oral reprimands, one demotion, and 35 instances of change in departmental practices.

Exhibit 6: Comparison of Investigation Results 2006-2008



Source: Integrity Line Resolution Tracking Reports from 2006-2008

Departments Should Investigate Complaints Thoroughly

Because fewer investigations are yielding corrective action and the actions taken in 2008 were relatively mild, the steering committee is concerned that departments may not be conducting thorough investigations or taking appropriate corrective action on the basis of investigations. For example:

- A complaint reported that an employee had been taking home a city vehicle and leaving his personal vehicle in the employee parking lot. The department's report stated that the employee was authorized to take the city vehicle home; the report failed to show why the employee had overnight use of the city vehicle and whether he had met the city's requirements for overnight use of a city vehicle.
- An employee was allowed to continue his employment after being charged with driving under the influence, while other personnel in similar circumstances were allegedly terminated. The department did not provide any information about the witnesses they interviewed or the basis of the investigation.

In other instances, the department may have conducted a thorough investigation but failed to take appropriate disciplinary action. For example:

- A department concluded a Black employee had used a racial slur towards a Hispanic employee, which was overheard by a witness. The department counseled the employee for his behavior but took no further disciplinary action.

Despite Fewer Calls, the Integrity Line Has Value

The Integrity Line continues to provide value to the city by establishing a mechanism for employees and members of the public to report potential fraud and other allegations of wrongdoing. According to the Association of Certified Fraud Examiners, more than half of all governmental frauds are detected by tips, and the median loss per incident is 60 percent lower for organizations with an anonymous hotline than for organizations without a hotline. Further the Integrity Line steering committee provides an independent group, not connected with a single department, to evaluate each complaint and determine which merit review by an outside entity. The steering committee has provided an independent resource within the city for elected officials and departments to use when they receive serious allegations about high-level officials within their department. For example, in December 2008 the City Council asked the Integrity Line Steering Committee to conduct an audit and investigation of council expenditures, which resulted in two settlements in ethics cases and an audit recommending 10 changes in council policies and procedures. The committee has received similar requests from the watershed management and law departments. The existence of the committee means that the city can conduct an independent, internal investigation with fair and impartial results.

Recommendations

The Integrity Line steering committee makes the following recommendations, consistent with recommendations from past years:

1. The Mayor and City Council should continue to fund the Integrity Line and the Integrity Matters program.
2. Departments should conduct timely and thorough investigations into Integrity Line Complaints by using the law department's report template to provide clear descriptions of their findings and action taken, and by taking immediate and appropriate disciplinary action.
3. The commissioner of human resources should review current disciplinary practices to assess whether departments are holding employees accountable for misconduct in accordance with the city's progressive discipline policy and whether disciplinary practices are consistent among departments. If needed, the commissioner should develop guidelines on an appropriate range of consequences to fit common types of wrongful conduct citywide.
4. The City Council and department heads should refer cases to the Integrity Line steering committee when they need an independent investigation into allegations involving elected officials or high-level appointed officials in their department.

Appendix 1

Call Jurisdiction

Audit	Compliance	Ethics	Joint Jurisdiction	Departments
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Accounting and audit irregularities 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Kickbacks • Substance abuse • Workplace violence or threats • Discrimination • Sexual harassment 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Conflicts of interest 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Falsification of city records • Fraud • Fraudulent insurance claims • Release of confidential information • Retaliation against whistleblowers • Theft of cash • Theft of goods & services • Theft of time • Wage & hour issues • Policy issues • Employee relations at bureau director level and above 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Employee relations below bureau director level • Customer relations • Safety issues • Sanitation complaints

Source: Protocol for Handling Integrity Line Complaints

The Integrity Line protocol for assigning hotline complaints provides the following:

- Complaints falling within the sole jurisdiction of audit, compliance, or ethics are automatically assigned to that office for investigation.
- Complaints falling within the jurisdiction of more than one office may be assigned to any of the three offices.
Example: Department head's personal use of a city vehicle
- Complaints involving matters for which audit, compliance, and ethics hold joint jurisdiction with city departments may be retained or referred to the appropriate department; the department is asked to investigate the matter and report its findings within 30 days.
Example: Theft of time
- Complaints involving the city that do not fall within the jurisdiction of audit, compliance, or ethics are referred to the appropriate department for handling; the department is not required to report back and the case is closed out.
Example: Water bill dispute
- Complaints involving an issue outside the jurisdiction of the city are closed immediately, but the caller is given a referral number whenever possible.
Example: Complaint against Sandy Springs

Appendix 2

