

# Lehigh County Controller's Office

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Lehigh County Controller Mark Pinsley

# What is the Controller?

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- The Controller is one of Lehigh County's row offices along with the Coroner, Sheriff, District Attorney and Clerk of Judicial Records.
- It's a full-time elected position, elected every four years with the next election coming up in 2023. I was elected in 2019.
- The Controller is Lehigh County's chief fiscal watchdog, responsible for making sure that your taxpayers dollars are being spent ethically and effectively.

# Who Am I?

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- I'm Mark Pinsley, prior to serving as the Lehigh County Controller, I was a South Whitehall Township Commissioner.
- My background is in business and executive management. I have my M.B.A from the University of Indiana Kelly School of Business.
- I'm a veteran of the United States Army Reserves where I served during my schooling.
- I'm a small business owner, I own a skincare company called Dermamed outside of Philadelphia.

# What does the office do?

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- We review bi-weekly payroll checks and monthly pension payments and make sure that the proper amount is being dispensed to each employee.
- We review and evaluate internal money management procedures for offices that handle petty cash to ensure there are proper safeguards against fraud.
- We audit hotel tax revenue from each of Lehigh County's hotels to ensure compliance with our county-wide hotel tax.
- We perform monthly desk audits for Magisterial District Judge offices and all row offices to identify potential fraud red-flags.
- We audit our county-owned senior care and rehabilitation center, Cedarbrook, to ensure that residents are being properly billed for services and proper financial safeguards are in place.

# Audit Highlights

## Highmark Prescription Drug Audit

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- In 2019, under my direction, Controller's Office audited our Highmark Prescription drug plan.
- I wanted to understand the impact of Pharmacy Benefit Managers or insurance middlemen who add additional costs to our healthcare.
- Our audit found that Lehigh County lost out on \$1.4 million in savings in 2019 because of our reimbursement late and differences in drug costs from suppliers.
- In addition, Lehigh County sends over \$600,000 a year to an out-of-state pharmacy online ordering service depriving local pharmacies of potential revenue.
- We put forth numerous recommendations to address this, no steps have yet been taken.

# Constable Audit

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- In Pennsylvania, constables are elected officials responsible for serving warrants to defendants who haven't shown for trial.
- Constables are compensated for each warrant served including follow-up warrants if the defendant doesn't respond.
- Controller's Office looked at bringing mailing follow-ups in house to reduce costs and generate additional revenue.
- Controller's Office found that having Sheriff perform follow-up mailings would generate \$276,225 in additional revenue.

# Cedarbrook Audit

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- Lehigh County operates a county-owned Senior Care and Rehabilitation Center with two locations, South Whitehall and Fountain Hill.
- It provides services such as physical therapy for short-term patients as well as long-term residents no longer capable of living independently.
- Controller's Office conducted Nursing Home Fund to determine adequacy of internal controls.
- Report determined that flaws in billing procedures resulted in a loss of \$450,000 not charged to residents for services.

# Non-Audit Service

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- In 2019, my most significant contribution to the Lehigh County Controller's Office was the introduction of Non-Audit Services.
- These special reports are designed to shed light on key policy questions by examining the financial impact of policy decisions on the community and the county.
- They're modeled after reports completed by our former Auditor General Eugene DePasquale.



# Non-Audit Service Highlights

## Single-Use Plastics

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- Single-use plastics such as straws and plastic bags result in tremendous litter and environmental degradation.
- They clog our sewer system, destroy our greenspace and threaten our wildlife.
- We produced a non-audit service detailing the impact of placing a fee on single-use plastics, specifically bags.
- Our research determined that fees were an effective way to encourage consumers to take advantage of reusable bags and had a minimal impact on low-income residents.
- Our non-audit service utilized data about the financial impacts of plastic bags on municipal budgets, loss of wildlife and total volume of plastic in landfills. We also reviewed research about plastic bag bans.
- We're currently working with Commissioner Percy Dougherty to implement a county-wide fee on plastic bags.

# Prison Phone Costs

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- Lehigh County currently has a contract that provides it will \$700,000 a year in commissions resulting from inmates paying to use phones in the county jail.
- The Controller's Office evaluated the average cost of prison phone calls across Pennsylvania counties and its impact on families.
- We determined Lehigh County was in the middle in terms of cost per minute and thus could lower costs if it chose to do so.
- Controller's Office recommended significantly reducing the cost of phone calls to inmates or absorbing the full cost. Phone call cost is essentially a double tax as families are mostly paying the cost as well as their annual property tax to support the jail.
- Controller's Office also reached out to Allegheny County commissioners who were working on legislation prohibiting profiting off of prisoners.

# Cash Bail

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- Controller's Office also looked at the financial consequences of cash bail.
- We worked with a local data firm to evaluate bail data to determine number of inmates held on bail, types of offenses and total duration of stay.
- We also looked at average bail amount by Magisterial District Judges to see if there were wide fluctuations.
- Our research indicated about half of people held behind bars were there because they couldn't post bail.
- Controller's Office has recommended the elimination of cash bail and switching to release with community support model where defendants are released and provide support to return for trial.

# Conclusion

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- Under my leadership, I've worked to bring innovation to the office and use it to shine a light on areas where the county can improve policy.
- I've highlighted what I believe to be injustices and an ineffective use of taxpayer dollars.
- I've looked for cost-savings from our county's biggest expenses such as the county corrections and healthcare.
- I've been non-partisan and independent, I've audited and pushed for changes regardless of party registration.

Questions?

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# Links

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- <https://www.lehighcounty.org/Departments/Controller-> Main website
- <https://www.lehighcounty.org/Departments/Controller/Reports-Reviews->  
Link to our reports and audit findings
- Questions: Email [JoshSiegel@LehighCounty.org](mailto:JoshSiegel@LehighCounty.org)