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Time To Focus On Fraud Line

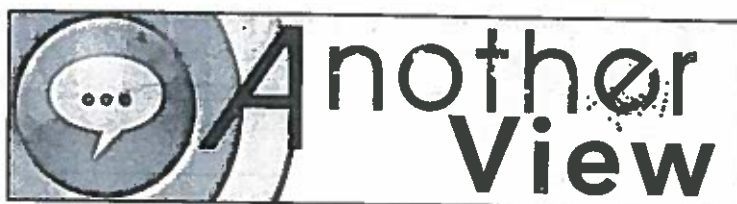
BY LAURA DOUD
CITY AUDITOR

It's that time of year again. I'm not talking about the cooler fall weather with the slight change in color of leaves or the impending hustle and bustle of the holiday season. I'm talking about International Fraud Awareness Week — the one week out of the year that is set aside to raise awareness about the negative impact of fraud, waste and abuse. And in this case, I'm talking specifically about fraud, waste and abuse against the city of Long Beach.

As City Auditor, I lead an office dedicated to deterring, detecting and disclosing fraud within the city. I made the commitment when I took office in 2006 to revitalize the City Auditor's Fraud Hotline. The value of having this fraud hotline is that it is the only Long Beach city reporting system that allows city employees, vendors, business owners and citizens to easily and anonymously report tips at any time.

I recognize that most of our city employees and vendors are hardworking and honest; however, it is crucial to acknowledge that fraud, waste and abuse can and does occur. Fraud, waste and abuse against our city impacts each of us, resulting in a loss of public revenue reducing budgets for important city services including public safety, street repair, libraries and parks.

The fraud hotline has been



incredibly beneficial as tips received through it have resulted in investigations and important audits. In just the past three years, my office has released six significant audits due to tips received through the fraud hotline. Highlights include:

- An audit which found issues with contract oversight for on-call emergency board-up services performed by subcontractors — some receiving an inappropriate rate increase of up to 65%. This contributed to unfair costs to citizens and businesses.

- A Police and Fire Public Safety Dispatcher Overtime Audit which found 9-1-1 dispatchers were working a significant amount of overtime, up to nearly 100% of their salaries. Not only was there a cost of \$1.3 million incurred by the overtime, but this much overtime can lead to serious dispatcher fatigue, posing an unnecessary risk to public safety.

- A more recent audit, originating from complaints regarding parks, found there was a \$1 million annual shortfall for park and park tree maintenance as the city continued to expand parks without managing resources. Parks play a critical role in creating healthy, livable communities and we want to ensure the quality of

our parks are sustained for future generations.

With these audits triggered by tips, you can see it's not always just about dollars and cents, but also about important issues and services that affect the quality of life.

I would like to again remind everyone to be alert of any potential wrongdoing against the city. No tip is too small or minor to report. If something doesn't add up, sound right or feel right, I encourage you to take the time to report it. You can anonymously report tips 24 hours a day, 7 days a week to the City Auditor's Fraud Hotline:

- Call 1-888-FRAUD-07 (1-888-372-8307)

- Fill out a form at CityAuditorLauraDoud.com

Your tips are helpful in the success of our office's work and can create real, positive change. Together we can make our city better by protecting taxpayer dollars and ensuring they are used for the public's benefit. You can find out more information on city fraud, waste and abuse and the City Auditor's Fraud Hotline at CityAuditorLauraDoud.com.

Laura Doud has been city auditor since 2006, winning reelection in 2010 and 2014.