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FRAUD HOTLINE BENEFITS COMMUNITY

By Johnny Romo

Cities and communities are mostly made up of hard working residents that all strive to make where they live a better place. But all cities have individuals who may try to gain more than they should through fraudulent behavior. Long Beach City Auditor Laura Doud came up with a solution to city fraud. In 2007, she implemented the City Auditor's Fraud Hotline.

The fraud hotline is available to any resident in Long Beach to report fraudulent behavior anonymously. It was made in an effort to cut back on fraud, waste and abuse of funds as well as increase work efficiency.

Doud recently came out with a report that shows how much the fraud hotline has benefited the city.

According to the report, a total of 439 tips have been called in through the fraud hotline since it was made. In the last two years, 58 tips were received. Out of those 58 tips, 40 per-

cent were filed from city employees, 36 percent were from Long Beach residents and the remaining 24 percent were anonymous.

"These tips help so much," said Doud. "When employees call with a tip, we use it as a starting point and take it from there."

Doud said that finding fraud without anonymous tips is next to impossible. She said that her office really appreciates the help that the community has given.

"Finding fraud without the help of others is like trying to find the needle in a haystack," said Doud. "These tips are so important to us."

When a tip is received, the office of the city auditor may take one of five courses of action. They can conduct their own investigation, conduct a full audit, direct a different department to conduct an investigation, request an outside agency to review the tip or they may close a case if there

Continued on page 4

Continued from page 1

is not enough evidence to go further.

Tips range from a number of different issues such as efficiency issues, employees abusing their working hours, misuse of city property, conflict of interest and public benefits fraud.

Doud encourages residents to call the hotline if there is any suspicion of city fraud whatsoever.

"If something doesn't add up or if something just feels wrong, call," said Doud. "Even if you are unsure, call just in case. We pursue every tip to the fullest extent of the law."

These fraudulent behaviors all cost the city money. Reporting tips has led to the city improving how it

manages about \$1.4 million in overtime pay and \$9 million in revenue every year.

"We work for the people of this city," said Doud. "These are their dollars at stake. We want to be as transparent as possible to show everyone what goes on in this office."

Residents can report city fraud tips anonymously 24 hours a day, seven days a week.

"We have made reporting city fraud as easy as possible for people," said Doud.

To report a tip anonymously, call the City Auditor's Fraud Hotline at 1-888-FRAUD-07 or report a tip online at cityauditorlauradoud.com.

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