

**BRIEFING SHEET**[Report 15-13](#)

August 2015

State Auditor[Joe Chrisman](#)**Complaints Considered by the Government Accountability Board****Background**

The Government Accountability Board (GAB) oversees and investigates alleged violations of Wisconsin's election, campaign finance, lobbying, and code of ethics laws. In December 2014, we released a comprehensive evaluation (report 14-14) of GAB. However, our evaluation's scope was limited because the Attorney General opined in July 2014 that existing statutes prohibited GAB from providing us with certain confidential records. 2015 Wisconsin Act 2, which became effective in March 2015, requires GAB to provide such records to us in order for us to carry out our statutory responsibilities. We have now completed the audit work that we could not finish in report 14-14.

Key Findings

We found:

- From fiscal year (FY) 2010-11 through FY 2012-13, GAB's Ethics and Accountability Division initiated an estimated 204 inquiries involving campaign finance, lobbying, code of ethics, and election complaints and concerns. These inquiries resulted in GAB initiating 21 investigations.
- Statutes allow GAB to retain special investigators to conduct investigations. From FY 2010-11 through FY 2013-14, GAB executed 11 contracts with special investigators.
- From FY 2011-12 through FY 2013-14, GAB's expenditures for seven investigations totaled \$315,800, excluding salaries and fringe benefits for GAB's staff because staff did not track the amount of time they spent on tasks related to these investigations.
- If GAB votes to initiate an investigation and is considering retaining a special investigator, statutes require staff to provide GAB with the names of three qualified individuals who may be retained in that capacity. The available information indicates that staff did not consistently provide GAB with the names of three individuals.
- From FY 2010-11 through FY 2012-13, an estimated 1,894 complaints were filed with GAB's Elections Division. None of these complaints remains open. Staff recently closed 277 of these complaints because they believed no further action was warranted. Staff did so in some instances because the complaints pertained to incidents that had occurred several years ago.
- The materials and minutes of the closed portions of GAB's meetings in FY 2012-13 indicate GAB made 21 decisions related to complaints and inquiries. In doing so, the information indicates that GAB agreed with 13 staff recommendations.
- In response to recommendations we made in report 14-14, GAB's staff developed written complaint procedures and a database for tracking complaints. It will be important for staff to consistently follow the written procedures, use the database to track all complaints, and resolve complaints in a timely manner.

Audit Recommendations

We include recommendations for GAB's staff to:

- comply with statutes by consistently providing GAB with the names of three qualified individuals who may be retained as a special investigator;
- and consistently resolve complaints in a timely manner.

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