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# Congress of the United States

## House of Representatives

COMMITTEE ON OVERSIGHT AND GOVERNMENT REFORM

2157 RAYBURN HOUSE OFFICE BUILDING

WASHINGTON, DC 20515-6143

MAJORITY (202) 225-5074  
FACSIMILE (202) 225-3974  
MINORITY (202) 225-5051

<http://oversight.house.gov>

August 1, 2013

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Ms. Mary Ann Christopher  
President and Chief Executive Officer  
Visiting Nurse Service of New York  
107 East 70<sup>th</sup> Street  
New York, NY 10021

Dear Ms. Christopher:

The Committee on Oversight and Government Reform is conducting oversight of New York State's Medicaid program. On March 5, 2013, the Committee issued a bipartisan report on the program which concluded that the State had "misspen[t] tens of billions of Federal tax dollars over the past few decades."<sup>1</sup> One aspect of the Committee's oversight of New York's Medicaid program is the claim that the New York State Office of Medicaid Inspector General (OMIG), the State agency responsible for oversight of State Medicaid spending, has become "a highly politicized, dysfunctional, mismanaged and ineffective agency where many of the 500 or so employees have little to do."<sup>2</sup> We are writing you to request that you provide documents and information to assist the Committee's oversight.

After publication of the Committee's report, many whistleblowers contacted the Committee to explain problems at OMIG, and several of them discussed the hold-up of OMIG's audit of Visiting Nurse Service of New York (VNS). Additionally, several media outlets have reported on OMIG's audit of VNS and, in particular, the failure of OMIG to finalize the audit and recover unlawfully spent money. According to the *Wall Street Journal*:

[A]uditors from the state Medicaid inspector general's office claimed [VNS] inflated Medicaid payments by billing for home-care services that weren't performed or weren't authorized by doctors as required by law. . . . The probe poses a potentially troubling development for Visiting Nurse Service, a venerable,

<sup>1</sup> REPORT BY THE H. COMM. ON OVERSIGHT & GOV'T REFORM, "Billions of Federal Tax Dollars Misspent on New York's Medicaid Program," H.REPT. NO. 113-11 (Mar. 5, 2013).  
[herinafter COMMITTEE REPORT].

<sup>2</sup> James M. Odat, *Fraud Agency Called Adrift*, ALBANY TIMES UNION (Nov. 18, 2012) (copy on file with author).

century-old company that claims to be the largest nonprofit home-health company in the nation. The Manhattan-based firm draws most of its revenue, which totaled \$1.1 billion in 2009, from Medicaid and Medicare.<sup>3</sup>

According to OMIG staff, as of November 2012, approximately 25,000 hours were expended conducting the VNS audit.<sup>4</sup> During a transcribed interview with Committee staff on June 20, 2013, James G. Sheehan, the former OMIG Inspector General, confirmed the 25,000-hour figure.<sup>5</sup>

Documents produced to the Committee by OMIG demonstrate there were dramatic reductions in the amount of findings of Medicaid overpayments received by VNS. For example, OMIG's findings of overpayments received by VNS totaled \$153,459,984 at an audit exit conference (during which OMIG discusses its preliminary findings with an audited entity) in February 2011.<sup>6</sup> The draft audit issued in May 2013 reduced the amount of Medicaid overpayments to \$94,136,232,<sup>7</sup> with an offer to settle the overpayments for \$68,244,267,<sup>8</sup> an amount \$85 million less than the findings of overpayments from February 2011.

Information obtained by the Committee indicates that during a 2011 meeting about the VNS audit, the Governor's Office advised OMIG not to release the audit. Additionally, your predecessor, Carol Raphael, "was paid \$1 million in 2009, is a member of [Governor] Cuomo's Medicaid team, a special policy panel appointed by the governor to redesign Medicaid and lower its costs."<sup>9</sup> Since the audit started, Ms. Raphael has donated \$2,250 to Governor Cuomo's campaign.<sup>10</sup>

These political donations, along with the position of Ms. Raphael on Governor Cuomo's Medicaid Redesign Team, the apparent involvement of the Governor's office with the audit, the lengthy hold-up of the audit, and the dramatic reduction of overpayment findings between 2011 and 2013 raise questions as to whether VNS has received favorable treatment due to its powerful political connections.

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<sup>3</sup> Jacob Gershman, *State Probing Overbilling of Medicaid*, WALL ST. J. (Feb. 10, 2011) (copy with author).

<sup>4</sup> Odat, *supra* note 2.

<sup>5</sup> Transcribed Interview with James G. Sheehan, Deputy Comm'r, N.Y.C. Human Res. Admin., and Comm. Staff (June 20, 2013).

<sup>6</sup> Office of the N.Y. State Medicaid Inspector General, Exit Summary Conference, Visiting Nurse Serv. of N.Y. Home Care, Inc. Home Health Agency Audit, Exit Conference Summary (Feb. 27, 2011), at 16.

<sup>7</sup> Letter from James C. Cox, Inspector General, Office of N.Y. State Medicaid Inspector General, to Joan Marren, Chief Operating Officer, Visting Nurse Serv. of N.Y. Home Care, Inc. (May 29, 2013) (Audit Draft 08-4466), at 1.

<sup>8</sup> *Id.* at 5.

<sup>9</sup> Gershman, *supra* note 3.

<sup>10</sup> N.Y. State Bd. of Elections, "Campaign Financial Disclosure," available at <http://www.elections.ny.gov>.

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More recently, a VNS subsidiary, VNS Choice,<sup>11</sup> came under additional scrutiny for inappropriate Medicaid billing. According to the *New York Times*, VNS Choice appears to have unlawfully enrolled many healthy individuals into its Medicaid managed care plan.<sup>12</sup> As a result of the *New York Times* reporting, the New York State Health Department suspended new enrollments into VNS Choice and implemented a payment suspension of some Medicaid payments to VNS Choice.<sup>13</sup> According to CMS, OMIG has also opened up an audit of VNS Choice's apparent enrollment of healthy seniors into its Medicaid managed care plans.

OMIG's large initial findings in its previous audit of VNS for Medicaid overpayments and these new reports of fraudulent enrollment into VNS Medicaid plans raise serious questions about the operation of VNS. Since federal tax dollars support over half of New York's Medicaid spending, the federal government would be entitled to at least half of the amount of any final settlement with VNS on the outstanding audit.<sup>14</sup> Additionally, federal taxpayers are liable for half of any additional VNS misspending in other areas. As a result, any improper treatment received by your company harms both state and federal taxpayers.

As part of the Committee's continuing oversight of New York's Medicaid program, we request that you produce the following information and documents, in electronic format, as soon as possible, but no later than 5:00 p.m. on August 15, 2013:

1. All documents and communications, including e-mails, between agents, contractors, or employees of the Visiting Nurse Service (VNS) and officials of any New York State agency, including the New York State Office of the Medicaid Inspector General, and the Executive Office of the Governor, referring or relating to any VNS audit, from January 1, 2008, to the present; and
2. All documents and communications, including e-mails, between agents, contractors, or employees of the Visiting Nurse Service (VNS) and officials and staff of the New York State Legislature, referring or relating to any VNS audit, from January 1, 2008, to the present.

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<sup>11</sup> *Corporate Information*, VISITING NURSE SERV. OF N.Y., available at <http://www.vnsny.org/about-us/corporate-information/> (last accessed July 19, 2013).

<sup>12</sup> Nina Bernstein, *Day Centers Sprout Up, Luring Fit Elders and Costing Medicaid*, N.Y. TIMES (Apr. 23, 2013), at A1; See Nina Bernstein, *State Suspends Enrollment in an Adult Care Plan Amid Concerns Over Fraud*, N.Y. TIMES (Apr. 26, 2013), at A 27.

<sup>13</sup> Letter from Jason A. Helgerson, Medicaid Dir., N.Y. State; James C. Cox, Medicaid Inspector General, Office of N.Y. State Medicaid Inspector General; and Monica H. Hickey-Martin, Special Deputy Att'y General, Medicaid Fraud Unit, Office of the N.Y. State Att'y General, to Peggy Thompson, Deputy Ctr. Dir., Ctr. of Medicare & CHIP Servs. (July 8, 2013), at 3.

<sup>14</sup> COMMITTEE REPORT, *supra* note 1, at 5.

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The Committee on Oversight and Government Reform is the principal oversight committee of the House of Representatives and may at "any time" investigate "any matter" as set forth in House Rule X. An attachment to this letter provides additional information about responding to the Committee's request.

When producing documents to the Committee, please deliver production sets to the Majority Staff in Room 2157 of the Rayburn House Office Building and the Minority Staff in Room 2471 of the Rayburn House Office Building. The Committee prefers, if possible, to receive all documents in electronic format.

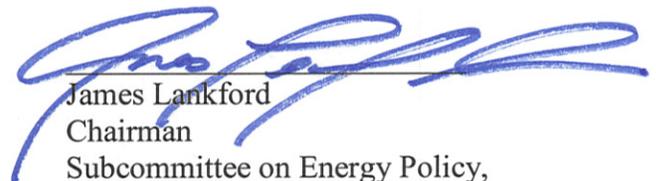
If you have any questions about this request, please contact Brian Blase or Matthew Tallmer of the Committee Staff at 202-225-5074. Thank you for your attention to this matter.

Sincerely,



Darrell Issa

Chairman



James Lankford

Chairman

Subcommittee on Energy Policy,  
Health Care and Entitlements



Jim Jordan

Chairman

Subcommittee on Economic Growth,  
Job Creation and Regulatory Affairs

Enclosure

cc: The Honorable Elijah E. Cummings, Ranking Minority Member

The Honorable Jackie Speier, Ranking Minority Member  
Subcommittee on Energy Policy, Health Care and Entitlements

The Honorable Matt Cartwright, Ranking Minority Member  
Subcommittee on Economic Growth, Job Creation, and Regulatory Affairs