



MARYLAND OFFICE OF THE INSPECTOR GENERAL FOR EDUCATION



Investigative Synopsis

OIG Case 26-0003-I

Issued: January 12, 2026



**MARYLAND OFFICE OF THE
INSPECTOR GENERAL FOR EDUCATION**
Richard P. Henry, Inspector General



January 12, 2026

To the Citizens of Maryland and Harford County,

The General Assembly, at its First Session after the adoption of the Maryland Constitution, established throughout the State a thorough and efficient System of Free Public Schools and shall provide by taxation, or otherwise, for their maintenance.¹ The Maryland Office of the Inspector General for Education (OIGE) plays a crucial role in protecting State funds allocated to local school systems. Our primary goal is to prevent and uncover fraud, waste, abuse, and educational mismanagement within School Boards, the Maryland State Department of Education, the Interagency Commission of School Construction, the twenty-four (24) local education agencies, and non-public schools that receive State funding across Maryland.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Office of the Inspector General for Education (OIGE) was contacted by Harford County Public Schools Board of Education President Dr. Aaron Poynton (Poynton) regarding an allegation that a computer and phone issued to the superintendent were stolen during an out-of-state conference. (Additional items listed as possibly stolen included a personal cellular phone, an iPad, an Apple Watch, and a wallet.) Dr. Poynton further stated that the equipment had been issued to Harford County Public Schools (HCPS) Superintendent Dr. Sean Bulson while he was attending and presenting at a conference in New Orleans, Louisiana, and that it may contain student information.

Background

The National School Board Association (NSBA) hosted its annual conference at the NOLA Ernest Morial Convention Center in New Orleans, Louisiana, from April 6 to April 8, 2024. Selected members of the Harford County Public School system and the Board of Education attended the conference. In addition to the personnel in attendance, Superintendent Dr. Sean Bulson (Bulson), Deputy Superintendent Eric Davis (Davis), and HCPS-BOE member Carroll Mueller were scheduled to present at the conference on April 6, 2024.

¹ Constitution of Maryland, Article VIII, Education, Section 1

Methodology

The OIGE conducted a limited-scope review of the handling of Harford County Public Schools (HCPS)-issued equipment while the Superintendent was on official travel. OIGE's review focused on safeguarding the equipment, reporting the missing items to the New Orleans Police Department, recovering the items, and the actions taken by HCPS personnel to secure, review, and reactivate the equipment. This review did not examine the specific circumstances surrounding how the items became misplaced before their recovery, as matters related to individual conduct or personnel accountability fall within HCPS's administrative authority and are outside the scope of this investigation. In conducting this review, OIGE conducted interviews and reviewed documents and audio recordings relevant to this matter.

Interview - Dr. Sean Bulson, Ed.D.

OIGE interviewed Bulson regarding the reporting of HCPS-issued equipment and the steps he took to notify HCPS personnel about the missing items. Bulson advised OIGE that he had checked into the Marriott Hotel on Friday, April 5, 2024, to attend the NSBA Conference. On the morning of April 6, 2024, he awoke to find he could not locate his HCPS-issued cellular phone and laptop, nor his personal cellular phone, Apple Watch, and iPad. Bulson believed the items may have been stolen. After unsuccessfully searching for the items, he left his room and went to Deputy Superintendent Davis's room. Bulson said he went to Davis's room to use his phone and told him about the loss. At approximately 9:20 AM, Bulson used Davis's HCPS-issued phone to make two calls. The first was a personal call to his wife, and the second was to the New Orleans Police Department (NOPD) to report that items in his room had been stolen. NOPD recorded this conversation, and the person heard on the audio reporting the missing items was Bulson.

Bulson stated that after reporting the items to NOPD, he then contacted the HCPS Director for the Office of Information Technology (ITD) and advised him that his HCPS-issued laptop and phone were missing and possibly stolen. Bulson stated that he asked the ITD to disable (lockdown) access to the laptop and HCPS phone, whether directly or remotely. After receiving assurance from the ITD that the laptop and phone were disabled, he then proceeded to the conference to give his 11:00 AM scheduled presentation.

Bulson stated that at the conclusion of his presentation, he met with the HCPS BOE President, Poynton, and informed him of the missing items. At that time, Bulson stated that Poynton advised him to notify HCPS's IT Division of the incident and to report it to the police. Bulson advised that he had already taken those steps, and both continued to attend scheduled conference events. Bulson said that the following day (Sunday evening), his service provider replaced his personal phone².

Bulson stated that on Monday, April 8, 2024, he was returning from the conference to Harford County in his car with Davis when he received a call on his personal phone from a Marriott Security representative. The representative advised Bulson that they had recovered personal

² Bulson used Deputy Superintendent Davis's HCPS-issued cellular phone to continue school system-related activity until he received a replacement phone from his personal cellular provider.

property from the safe in his assigned hotel room. The representative advised Bulson that a laptop, two phones, an iPad, and an Apple Watch had been recovered from the room safe³. Bulson said he coordinated with Marriott to return the items via FedEx. Bulson stated that he used his personal funds to have the items delivered to his home, not to his HCPS office.

Bulson stated that the items were delivered by FedEx a few days later and that upon receiving them, he contacted the ITD. Bulson noted that he asked the ITD to review the items to ensure they had not been accessed while they were missing. Bulson stated that the ITD conducted a review and determined they had not been accessed or compromised. Bulson stated that the ITD reactivated the equipment, and he resumed using the items. Bulson further noted that he continued to use the items for approximately six months. Bulson said that the laptop was replaced as part of HCPS's equipment replacement cycle. Bulson further stated that the two phones were also replaced with newer versions as part of the same replacement process.

Interview – Dr. Arron Poynton, D.P.A.

OIGE interviewed Poynton as to when he was first notified of the missing HCPS equipment, and he stated that he was informed the equipment had been recovered and returned to service. Poynton stated that Bulson approached him after he had concluded his presentation and advised him that he believed he had been “rolled” the last night and that his laptop, phones, and other items might have been stolen from his hotel room. Poynton stated that if he had not already done so, he should contact the police and notify the HCPS IT Director.

Poynton stated that upon his return from the conference, he learned that Marriott had contacted Bulson, found the missing property in his room safe, and returned it to him. Poynton stated that he did not pursue the matter further because the item had been returned and Bulson was using it.

Poynton further stated that, due to the recent media coverage of the events surrounding the 2024 NSBA conference, he contacted the ITD to confirm that the equipment Bulson stated had been returned was, in fact, the same equipment issued to him before the conference. Poynton stated that ITD confirmed that the equipment issued to Bulson before April 6, 2024, and reported as returned, was the same equipment he reviewed and reactivated.

Interview - HCPS Director - Office of Information Technology

The IT Director (ITD) stated that he was notified of the missing HCPS laptop and cellular device on April 6, 2024, around mid-to-late morning. He stated that the call came from a phone number he recognized as his supervisor, Eric Davis's, even though the caller, Superintendent Sean Bulson, was using that device. The ITD said that upon receiving the notification, HCPS immediately

³ Bulson recovered his wallet in his motel room. He had not been issued an HCPS purchase card, nor did he possess one.

disabled the Superintendent's Active Directory account and deactivated the device to prevent any potential unauthorized access.

The ITD stated that the recovered laptop was physically inspected by an HCPS technician approximately three to four days after it was reported missing. According to ITD, there was no evidence of physical tampering, such as forced access or removal of the hard drive. The ITD noted that HCPS does not use diagnostic tools to determine whether a device has been accessed without physical tampering; however, he emphasized that, absent such tampering, access would not have been possible once the account and device were disabled.

The ITD recalled that when the Superintendent returned to the office on Monday, April 8, 2024, he was issued a loaner device and a new cellular device. The ITD stated that the Superintendent advised him that the hotel had possession of the missing laptop and phone and that the items would be overnighted back. The Superintendent would only need the loaner laptop for a short time. The ITD indicated he was not told the devices had been stored in a hotel safe and could not confirm whether they were shipped directly to HCPS or to the Superintendent.

The ITD confirmed that the missing items were an HCPS-issued laptop and a cellular device, both protected by passwords or passcodes. He stated that HCPS's immediate response included deactivating the account and device, and that the Superintendent's limited access privileges, combined with two-factor authentication and data storage controls, mitigated any risk of unauthorized access. The ITD concluded that HCPS has no reason to believe a data breach occurred due to the missing equipment, given the numerous steps taken upon the device's reporting as missing.

Marriott Response

Marriott Corporate Security confirmed that an entry was made in their "Lost and Found" log for items recovered from Bulson's hotel room safe. These items included the identified alleged lost items and a laptop computer with a property identification sticker affixed, indicating it was the property of Harford County Public Schools.

FINDINGS

- 1) OIGE confirmed that Bulson contacted NOPD and reported that his accountable HCPS items had been stolen.
- 2) OIGE confirmed that the voice heard and recorded by the NOPD 911 system on April 6, 2024, was that of Bulson.
- 3) OIGE confirmed that Bulson contacted HCPS Director ITD about the missing laptop and phone, and that the ITD disabled Bulson's account and devices. Bulson's HCPS account was disabled from April 6, 2024, until April 8, 2024. The laptop was disabled from April

6, 2024, until it was returned to HCPS on April 12, 2024. Verizon disabled the HCPS issue phone on April 6, 2024. (Confirmation Number: 3116128682)

- 4) OIGE confirmed that Bulson notified HCPS BOE President Poynton of the alleged theft of the accountable HCPS items.
- 5) OIGE confirmed that Marriott Security contacted Bulson regarding the recovered items from his assigned hotel room and that they were returned to him.
- 6) OIGE confirmed that the HCPS-issued laptop and phone were returned to the ITD on April 12, 2024, and that the laptop was reactivated. The HCPS phone was returned and remained in HCPS inventory until November 19, 2024. At that time, HCPS sent the phone to its vendor, e-Cycler (a recycling company), for destruction as part of HCPS's end-of-cycle process. Following the initial report that Bulson's phone had been stolen, ITD ordered a new phone for Bulson, which HCPS received on April 8, 2024. HCPS's provider, Verizon, confirmed that the phone was suspended on April 6, 2024.
- 7) OIGE confirmed, through our interview with the ITD, that there was no evidence that Bulson's laptop or phone had been tampered with.

CONCLUSION

The OIGE's investigation found that Superintendent Bulson contacted 1) local law enforcement and 2) HCPS Board President Poynton to advise them of the April 5, 2024, incident and the alleged stolen property. Our investigation further indicated that Bulson contacted the ITD and requested that his HCPS-issued laptop and phone be immediately disabled. OIGE confirmed that Bulson was notified that the items initially identified as stolen were recovered from his Marriott hotel room and returned to him on or about April 11, 2024. Our review also confirmed that the laptop and phone were given to ITD on April 12, 2024, and that ITD confirmed the laptop had not been tampered with.

OIGE found that the incident surrounding the 2024 NSBA conference and the return of the alleged stolen items were considered a "dead issue" by BOE President Poynton and other board members. OIGE also found that board members were aware of what has been described as "rumors," or that nothing occurred because there was nothing reportable. Dr. Bulson has continued in his role for approximately 20 months after this incident without any further concerns from the board.

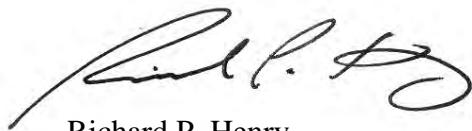
OIGE found that it was not until a copy of the NOPD audio recording of this incident, in which Bulson reported the alleged stolen items, became available that the board's suspicions concerning that event again came to light. OIGE found that, once the existence of the audio recording was known, posted on a social media site (Facebook), and reported on by a local news agency (Fox 45), the board learned more about the events reported to have occurred on April 5 and 6, 2024.

OIGE is aware of the totality of the events that occurred on April 5, 2024. However, those events fall outside the Inspector General's statutory authority and do not constitute fraud, waste, or

abuse. OIGE views the events of April 5, 2024, as a personal matter involving an individual reporting a crime. The conclusion of this matter is reserved for Dr. Bulson to share with the citizens of Harford County.

OIGE recognizes that information may be updated or changed after an investigation is complete. OIGE thanks the members of the Harford County Public School system, the Harford County Board of Education, the Harford County Public Schools Office of Information Technology, the Office of the State Inspector General for the State of Louisiana, the New Orleans Police Department, representatives from Marriott's Corporate Security, Dr. Sean Bulson, and Dr. Aaron Poynton for their cooperation during this investigation.

Respectfully,



Richard P. Henry
Inspector General

Cc: Dr. Dyann R. Mack, Ed.D., Interim Superintendent – Harford County Public Schools