



Office of the Washington State Auditor  
Pat McCarthy

# Whistleblower Investigation Report

## Washington State University

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**Office of the Washington State Auditor  
Pat McCarthy**

June 20, 2025

Dr. Elizabeth Cantwell, President  
Washington State University

**Report on Whistleblower Investigation**

Attached is the official report on Whistleblower Case No. 25-010 at the Washington State University.

The State Auditor's Office received an assertion of improper governmental activity at the University. This assertion was submitted to us under the provisions of Chapter 42.40 of the Revised Code of Washington, the Whistleblower Act. We have investigated the assertion independently and objectively through interviews and by reviewing relevant documents. This report contains the results of our investigation.

If you are a member of the media and have questions about this report, please contact Assistant Director of Communications Adam Wilson at (564) 999-0799. Otherwise, please contact Assistant Director for State Audit and Special Investigations Jim Brownell at (564) 999-0782.

Sincerely,

Pat McCarthy, State Auditor

Olympia, WA

cc: Governor Bob Ferguson  
Heather Lopez, Chief Audit Executive  
Kate Reynolds, Executive Director, Executive Ethics Board  
Erin Anderson, Special Investigations Program Manager

***Americans with Disabilities***

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# WHISTLEBLOWER INVESTIGATION REPORT

## Assertion(s) and Results

Our Office received a whistleblower complaint asserting an Emergent Surgery Technician in the Veterinary Teaching Hospital uses his state computer for personal Internet browsing during his shift at the University.

We found reasonable cause to believe the improper governmental action occurred.

## Background

The Washington State University-System has campuses in Pullman, Spokane, Tri-Cities, Vancouver, Everett, and online (Global Campus). More than 2,300 faculty members, 1,500 graduate assistants and 4,500 staff members serve almost 26,500 students.

The University has 11 academic colleges and the Graduate School. The colleges include Agricultural, Human and Natural Resource Sciences, Arts and Sciences, Business, Communication, Education, Engineering and Architecture, Honors, Medicine, Nursing, Pharmacy and Pharmaceutical Sciences, and Veterinary Medicine.

The subject worked as Emergent Surgery Technician within the Veterinary Teaching Hospital.

## About the Investigation

During our initial inquiry with the University about the whistleblower complaint, we learned the subject had already been under internal investigation for the same assertion. The University's Chief Audit Executive (CAE) conducted the internal investigation. To avoid duplication of state resources, we reviewed a copy of the University's investigation report dated April 7, 2025, to assess whether we could rely on its results.

### *University's Investigation Summary*

The CAE reviewed the subject's email and calendar records, along with the subject's log-in, download and Internet browser activity. The CAE identified at least eight emails from the subject's personal email with links or attachments to investment platforms, Internet downloads, personal emails he sent to himself to print at the University, email exchanges with his personal tax advisor, and log-ins to their tax account. The CAE interviewed the subject who confirmed he sent the emails to himself so he could print documents on the office printer.

The CAE also obtained and reviewed a log of browser activity associated with the subject's user ID for the period of January 2 to March 5, 2025. To evaluate the type of browsing activity the subject conducted, the CAE reviewed all URLs accessed and categorized, using their judgment, as one of the following:

- Personal Internet browsing
- Work-related
- Visits to the Department of Retirement System (DRS) website and other retirement platforms
- Undetermined

After categorizing the activity, the CAE concluded that 88% of the subject's web browsing on his work computer was personal in nature. Regarding visits to the DRS website, it is not improper for employees to access a University-sanctioned retirement website, but the use must be de minimis in nature. The CAE found that the number of times the subject visited these websites was beyond de minimis standard.

Based upon the evidence presented in the University's investigation, we concluded the results could be relied upon and we agree with the conclusions. Therefore, we found reasonable cause to believe an improper governmental action occurred.

### **University's Plan of Resolution**

*Thank you for the review, we agree with the results. We take our responsibility to be proper stewards of state resources seriously. The employee has been separated effective May 7, 2025.*

### **State Auditor's Office Concluding Remarks**

We thank University officials and personnel for their assistance and cooperation during the investigation.

## WHISTLEBLOWER INVESTIGATION CRITERIA

We came to our determination in this investigation by evaluating the facts against the criteria below:

**RCW 42.52.160 Use of persons, money, or property for private gain - (1)** No state officer or state employee may employ or use any person, money, or property under the officer's or employee's official control or direction, or in his or her official custody, for the private benefit or gain of the officer, employee, or another.

**WAC 292-110-010(1) and (3) – Use of state resources - (1)** Statement of principles. All state employees and officers are responsible for the proper use of state resources, including funds, facilities, tools, property, and their time. This section does not restrict the use of state resources as described in subsections (2) and (3) of this section.