



# Inspector General

## **2023-0010-INVI-P – Allegations of Theft, Misconduct, and Misrepresentation**

### **Suspected Violations of AOC “Standards of Conduct” and “Government Ethics” Policies. **Substantiated****

#### **Suspected Violation of 18 United States Code § 641 - Public money, property or records.**

On January 4, 2023, the Architect of the Capitol (AOC) Office of Inspector General (OIG), received a complaint that alleged an AOC employee misused AOC funds (including work time) in furtherance of their own orchid research and publications, failing to properly cite the AOC in the written publications. Additionally, it was reported that the employee did not follow proper protocols upon returning from an orchid research and collection trip overseas, which resulted in orchid seeds being seized upon entry to the United States. The employee resigned from the AOC prior to the conclusion of the investigation.

The investigation found that in November 2022, AOC paid a publication fee to an educational journal in the amount of \$3,564.00 for an article written by the employee. Consultation with AOC leadership confirmed this was common practice, as payment of publication fees for scholarly work generally resulted in the work being more widely accessible. Typically, the author then cited the educational facility or institution that supported their work within the article. In this instance, the published article made no mention of the author's employment, educational support or contributions from the AOC. Although professional and common practice, the OIG did not identify a policy that mandated the author cite the AOC if they funded the publication. The OIG also confirmed the employee had been occasionally permitted to utilize AOC time to work on publications and orchid research. The OIG did not identify evidence of criminal or AOC policy violations associated with this specific use of AOC time.

Regarding the overseas travel, the investigation determined that the employee had been approved to travel overseas on behalf of the AOC, in conjunction with other institutions, to collect seeds from native orchid species for propagation to help build living collections. Upon reentry to the United States, the employee attempted to import Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES) orchids in passenger baggage and was stopped for improper paperwork, causing the herbarium specimens to be seized. Because this was the first offense, the AOC was permitted to bring the shipment into compliance with assistance from another government agency. Although some specimens were inventoried by the other government agency, a complete inventory of the herbarium specimens remains unaccounted for. The overseas travel cost the AOC \$13,953.11 and has resulted in zero new plants added to the United States Botanic Garden's collection.

Included in the reentry documentation was a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) between the former AOC employee and the foreign country's government. AOC leadership confirmed the



position held by the AOC employee did not grant them the authority to enter into an agreement on behalf of the U.S. Government and that there was no official MOU between the AOC and the foreign country. In addition to the unaccounted orchid specimens and the unauthorized MOU, the former employee did not return their official Government sponsored passport prior to their resignation from the AOC. The OIG did not identify internal AOC policy governing oversight of Government sponsored passports; however, per U.S. Department of State guidelines, a special issuance passport is only for use by the individual in the position for which it was issued and is property of the U.S. Government.

The evidence obtained from the initial investigation was presented to the United States Attorney's Office in the District of Columbia (USAO-DC) which opened a case to further review the matter. Because the former employee had left the AOC and relocated to northern California (CA) to work at a private Botanic Garden, USAO-DC coordinated with USAO-CA in furtherance of the investigation. Both USAO-DC and USAO-CA reviewed the investigative findings and declined criminal prosecution in June and September 2025, respectively, citing prosecutorial discretion, resource considerations, and competing priorities.

**Final Management Action:** OIG's Report of Investigation was submitted to AOC management for any action deemed appropriate. No further investigative action by the OIG is anticipated, and the case is closed.