
CITY OF SAN ANTONIO

OFFICE OF THE CITY AUDITOR



Audit of Office of the City Clerk

Vital Records

Project No. AU20-007

July 9, 2021

Kevin W. Barthold, CPA, CIA, CISA
City Auditor

Executive Summary

As part of our annual Audit Plan approved by City Council, we conducted an audit of the Office of the City Clerk, specifically the Vital Records Division. The audit objectives, conclusions, and recommendations follow:

Determine if vital records data (birth and death certificates) are adequately protected and issued in accordance with City and State regulations.

The Office of the City Clerk is appropriately registering birth and death records and issuing certified copies in accordance with City and State regulations. Controls are in place to ensure the Vital Records Division is physically secure from external threats and that records and banknote paper is protected from theft or misuse. Vital Records personnel are also properly vetted and trained to manage sensitive records and data. In addition, systems used to store vital records data are appropriately restricted to authorized personnel only.

However, we did note the following areas where the Office of the City Clerk should improve vital records processes:

- All amended records should be appropriately marked as amended in both hard copy and electronic format.
- All birth records for deceased individuals born in Bexar County should be appropriately marked as deceased.
- Determine if password requirements for the Mainframe system can be modified to meet City standards.
- Update the disaster recovery plan to reflect best practices and include specifics for the Vital Records Division. Also, formally document the Vital Records Division Business Continuity Plan.

The Office of the City Clerk Management agreed with the audit findings and has developed positive action plans to address them. Management's verbatim response is in Appendix B on page 8.

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Background

The Vital Records Division has been under the Office of the City Clerk since 2012. It maintains records of births, deaths, and fetal deaths that occur in Bexar County. Vital Records stores hard copies of both birth and death records in bound notebooks. Hard copy birth records are available from 1897, death records from 1873, and fetal death records from 1952. It also stores electronic images of birth records from 1964 forward. Additionally, the Vital Records Division has access to a birth records system (TxEver) maintained by the Texas Department of State Health Services to retrieve and issue birth records of individuals born in Texas, but outside of Bexar County.

Vital Records is authorized to issue certificates to qualified applicants who provide adequate proof of eligibility.¹ Applicants can order certificates via mail, in person, or online using a third-party provider. Death certificates are usually obtained through the funeral home. Fees for both types of certificates are set by the State. Revenue from selling certificates, protective covers for certificates, notary fees, and postage were \$1,500,867 for fiscal year (FY) 2020.

Nearly all certificates and amendments are registered through the State's TxEver system (approximately 99.8%), which is the system of record. Vital Records staff download the vital records queue each day from TxEver and then upload partial information to the City's "Mainframe" system, which acts as an index. Complete birth records are uploaded to an image-based application (Viewer). Paper copies of birth records are printed and included in bound notebooks. Vital Records also handles a limited number of in-person registrations for home births. For FY 2020, Vital Records recorded 33,692 total birth certificates/amendments/replacements and 25,490 total death registrations/amendments and related documents.

¹ Qualified applicants, as defined by Texas Administrative Code §181.1(21), include parents, grandparents, spouse, child, sibling, legal guardian, and, for birth certificates, "self". Applicants must provide proof of identification as specified by §181.28(i), such as a valid driver's license or current passport.

Audit Scope and Methodology

The scope of this audit covered the registration, safeguarding, and issuance of certificates for birth and death records as well as associated amendments and corrections for the period October 2018 through December 2020.

We interviewed staff, reviewed policies and procedures, and observed processes at the Vital Records Division office to understand and test controls for registering, maintaining, and issuing certificates for birth and death records. Testing criteria included pertinent Texas statutes and regulations, the Local Registrar Handbook,² and relevant City administrative directives.

Significant internal control components and principles include control activities such as supervisory approvals, maintaining logs for issuance and voiding of banknote paper, badge and key physical access restrictions, employee vetting and training, and provisioning for IT system access. We reviewed each control activity during our tests of procedures.

We relied on data in Mainframe and Viewer to test the controls over birth and death record registration and issuance. Our reliance was based on performing direct tests on the data rather than evaluating the system's general and application controls. Our direct testing included reviewing the accuracy and completeness of birth and death records in each system and testing supporting documentation for issuance of certificates.

We conducted this performance audit in accordance with generally accepted government auditing standards. Those standards require that we plan and perform the audit to obtain sufficient, appropriate evidence to provide a reasonable basis for our findings and conclusions based on our audit objectives. We believe that the evidence obtained provides a reasonable basis for our findings and conclusions based on our audit objectives.

² The Local Registrar Handbook was published by the Vital Statistics Unit of the Texas Department of State Health Services, October 2019 revision.

Audit Results and Recommendations

The Office of the City Clerk is appropriately registering birth and death records and issuing certified copies in accordance with City and State regulations. Controls are in place to ensure the Vital Records Division is physically secure and that records and banknote paper are adequately protected from theft or misuse. Vital Records personnel are also properly vetted and trained to manage sensitive records and data. In addition, systems used to store vital records data are appropriately restricted to authorized personnel only.

A. Birth and Death Record Management

1. Amendments and Corrections

Amendments to birth records were not consistently recorded in both the hard copy and electronic versions.

Most vital records are filed with the State and amendments to these records, such as correcting an incorrect birth date, are processed by the State and forwarded to the Local Registrar office where the recorded birth event occurred. The amendment becomes a part of the original record and must be filed as an addendum. Both the original and the amendment must be printed together on a single page when issuing a certified copy.

We selected a random sample of 25 from the total population of 41 birth record amendments for FY2019 and FY2020 and reviewed the accuracy and completeness of record data to ensure each associated birth record was marked as amended and the amendment information was available. We found 24 of 25 records had inconsistencies between the hard copy and image scans in Viewer. Results of our tests are summarized below.

Number of Records Tested	Hard Copy Original Present	Hard Copy Original Marked Amended	Hard Copy Amendment in Binder	Viewer Original Present	Viewer Original Marked Amended	Amendment Scanned to Viewer
1	Yes	No	No	Yes	No	Yes
2	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	No
7	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	No	No
14	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	No
1	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes

Without accurate and complete records, Vital Records may be unaware a record was amended and provide an erroneous birth certificate to a customer.

2. Birth and Death Record Matching

Birth records were not always marked appropriately for deceased individuals.

State statute³ mandates that upon receipt of notification of the death of a person born in a local registrar's county, the local registrar shall then make a conspicuous notation on the decedent's birth certificate that the person is deceased. Statute does not set a limit on the age of the decedent for this process. However, the Local Registrar's Handbook specifies this process should be performed for decedents age 55 and under.

We selected a judgmental sample of 32 death records from individuals born in Bexar County who died during the scope period and reviewed each selection to determine if the corresponding birth record was marked as deceased. We determined that:

- 7 of 32 records were marked as deceased in Viewer
- 10 of 32 records were marked deceased on the hard copy

Matching the birth records with death records and marking the birth certificates as deceased prevents potential fraud or misuse of birth certificates by unauthorized individuals.

Recommendations

A.1 The City Clerk should implement a process to ensure amended records are properly marked and amendment information is available in both hard copy and electronic format.

A.2 The City Clerk should implement a process to ensure all birth records for deceased individuals are marked properly with date of death.

B. IT Systems

The Vital Records Division currently uses Mainframe as a record-indexing system, but this system's password security does not conform to the City's password requirements.

City Administrative Directive 7.4a requires passwords to be at least 8 characters, contain both upper and lower-case letters, a numerical digit, and a non-alphanumeric character.

³ Texas Health and Safety Code [HSC §191.034]

We were informed by ITSD personnel that Mainframe password security had the following characteristics:

Mainframe Password Requirement	Meets COSA AD 7.4a
No mixed-case passwords	No
4-8 character limit	No
Only letters and numbers allowed	No
No previous passwords	Yes
Password expiration prompts	Yes

Strong passwords are an important element of information security. Failure to meet the standards established in City administrative directives exposes the City to internal and external vulnerabilities which may reduce the reliability, confidentiality, integrity and/or availability of those systems.

Recommendation

The City Clerk should determine if the password requirements for the Mainframe system can be updated to meet City standards.

C. Disaster Recovery and Business Continuity

A Disaster Recovery Plan (DRP) exists for the Office of the City Clerk; however, it is out of date and does not specifically address the Vital Records Division. Also, the Business Continuity Plan (BCP) for the division is not documented.

We reviewed the most recent DRP, signed by Leticia Vacek in January 2018, and found that the plan focuses on stabilizing the condition of records before removal, recovery of the maximum number of records, and cost prevention. However, it does not address the sensitive nature and personnel requirements to access and handle vital records data, such as background checks and appropriate training.

Additionally, we found:

- 3 of 4 employees listed as Disaster Recovery Team Members are active City employees; but one has withdrawn (November 2019).
- The DRP does not specify a recovery work site or assign tasks to specific members of the DRP team.
- The map included does not include the Vital Records offices
- Several personnel and vendor contacts are out of date

A disaster recovery plan is a documented, structured approach that describes how an organization can quickly resume work after an unplanned incident. An outdated DRP may hinder appropriate and effective record recovery and the re-establishment of operations in a timely manner.

The Vital Records Division also does not have a written BCP. This is different from a DRP in that it is a plan to keep operations functional during an incident and immediately after. However, through our observation we found that the Vital Records Division has been executing alternative procedures since the beginning of the pandemic. Thus, procedures exist, but are not documented, which would pose difficulties if current staff were not available.

Recommendations

The City Clerk should update the Disaster Recovery Plan and include specific considerations for the Vital Records Division. Also, formally document the Vital Records Division Business Continuity Plan.

Appendix A – Staff Acknowledgement

Mark Bigler, CPA-Utah, CISA, CFE, Audit Manager
Daniel Kuntzelman, CIA, CISA, Auditor in Charge
Susan Van Hoozer, CIA, CISA, Auditor
Javier Castillo, IT Auditor

Appendix B – Management Response



CITY OF SAN ANTONIO

SAN ANTONIO TEXAS 78283-3966

May 19, 2021

Kevin W. Barthold, CPA, CIA, CISA
City Auditor
San Antonio, Texas

RE: Management's Corrective Action Plan for the Audit of The Office of the City Clerk Vital Records

The Office of the City Clerk has reviewed the audit report and has developed the Corrective Action Plans below corresponding to report recommendations.

Recommendation					
#	Description	Audit Report Page	Accept, Decline	Responsible Person's Name/Title	Completion Date
A.1	Amendments The City Clerk should implement a process to ensure amended records are properly marked and amendment is available in both hard copy and electronic format.	4	Accept	Terri Hernandez-Chapa, Assistant City Clerk	September 30, 2021

Recommendation					
#	Description	Audit Report Page	Accept, Decline	Responsible Person's Name/Title	Completion Date
	<p>Action plan:</p> <p>In response to the internal audit, the Office of the City Clerk Vital Records Division immediately expanded their reviews of vital record amendment processing to include birth amendments and death amendments received to ensure adherence to maintaining accurate data on vital records in paper, and electronic formats. Review and update to all records identified by the internal audit have been completed on hard copy and electronic formats to ensure amended records are properly marked and filed.</p> <p>Currently the Vital Record Division maintains vital record in the following systems: vital record books (paper format), Main Frame (electronic format), and File Net Viewer (electronic format), additionally the Division also utilizes the external vital record repository managed by the Department of State Health System in TxEver. The Vital Records Division is actively working with the Information Technology Services Department (ITSD) to resolve technical limitations to allow Vital Record staff modification access to revise and update all electronic formats of vital records. Records depending electronic update will be completed once the current scanning modifications, and functionality updates requested from ITSD are completed.</p> <p>Additionally, the Vital Records Division is in process of discontinuing the use of Mainframe and enhancing the functionality of File Net Birth Viewer, these two initiatives are in conjunction with the Information Technology Services Department. Included in these initiatives, the Vital Records Division will further expand their record review and controls to include added functionality for compliance with the State's requirements for handling record amendments electronically in the systems replacing the Mainframe and existing File Net Viewer application, the new system is scheduled to be completed and in use by September 30, 2021.</p>				
A.2	<p>Birth and Death Matching</p> <p>The City Clerk should implement a process to ensure all birth records for deceased individuals are marked properly with date of death.</p>	4	Accept	Terri Hernandez-Chapa, Assistant City Clerk	July 31, 2021

Recommendation					
#	Description	Audit Report Page	Accept, Decline	Responsible Person's Name/Title	Completion Date
	<p>Action plan:</p> <p>In response to the internal audit, the Office of the City Clerk Vital Records Division immediately expanded their reviews of vital record birth and death processing to ensure adherence to maintaining accurate data on vital records in hard copy, and electronic formats. Review and update to all records identified by the internal audit have been completed to ensure properly marked hard copy and electronic formats of birth records are filed.</p> <p>The Office of the City Clerk is currently revising the policy to process manual changes to vital records for all birth records to ensure proper internal controls and oversight are in place. Training for all Vital Record staff handling death amendments will be conducted and a signed acknowledgment form will be kept on file. To improve compliance and record accuracy the Vital Records Division will conduct internal periodic review of vital records on a quarterly basis to ensure staff is complying with changes to manual birth records and death records. The Vital Records Division will utilize ad-hoc Birth to Death matching reports from the Department of State Health Services system, TxEver to identify records and verify deceased individuals are marked appropriately.</p>				
B	<p>IT Systems</p> <p>The City Clerk should determine if password requirements for the Mainframe system can be updated to meet City standards.</p>	5	Accept	Terri Hernandez-Chapa, Assistant City Clerk	September 30, 2021
	<p>Action plan:</p> <p>The Office of the City Clerk Vital Records Division is in process of discontinuing the use of Mainframe and replacing the software with a new system, Vital Records System (VRS.) The password criteria for VRS has been included in the user requirements to include: length, complexity, character, case sensitivity to meet City standards. The new VRS system is scheduled to be completed and in use by September 30, 2021, at that time Mainframe will no longer be in use at Vital Records Division.</p>				
C	<p>Disaster Recovery Plan</p> <p>The City Clerk should update the Disaster Recovery Plan and include specific considerations for Vital Records Division. Also, formally document the Vital Records Division Business Continuity Plan.</p>	6	Accept	Tina J. Flores, City Clerk	January 31, 2022
	<p>Action plan:</p> <p>The Office of the City Clerk is currently revising the Disaster Recovery Plan, Business Continuity Plan and Workforce Plan for all OCC divisions: Archives, Records, Passports, Vital Records, and City Hall. The revised plans will include all OCC physical locations at: Municipal Archives Record Facility (MARS), City Hall and City Tower.</p>				

We are committed to addressing the recommendations in the audit report and the plan of actions presented above.

Sincerely,


Tina J. Flores
City Clerk
Office of the City Clerk

6/23/2021
Date