

ANDREW M. CUOMO
Governor

ANN MARIE T. SULLIVAN, M.D.
Commissioner

CHRISTOPHER TAVELLA, Ph.D.
Executive Deputy Commissioner

Notice Pursuant to Deficit Reduction Act of 2005 § 6032

I. *Policy*

It is the policy of the New York State Office of Mental Health (OMH) that all associates, including employees, contractors, vendors, consultants and agents who provide health care services or perform billing and coding functions shall comply with all applicable Federal and New York State false claims laws and regulations and whistleblower protections. As a part of the OMH Compliance program, New York State employees and others receive training on these laws, which are summarized below, and should consult with the OMH Compliance Officer if they have any questions about the application of these laws to their job.

OMH also provides this notice to its contractors and agents in order to comply with Section 6032 of the Deficit Reduction Act (DRA) of 2005, which requires health care entities receiving \$5 million or more in Medicaid reimbursement during a federal fiscal year to establish written policies and procedures informing their employees, contractors and agents about federal and state false claim acts and whistleblower protections. OMH's Medicaid Compliance Policy and Procedure is available on the OMH website.

For purposes of Section 6032, contractors not associated with the provision of Medicaid health care items or services, such as copy or shredding services, grounds maintenance, or hospital cafeteria or gift shop services, are excluded from the definition of contractor and are not required to receive and review this Notice.

The information in this Notice is intended to highlight certain wrongful "false claims" activity that federal and state governments have specifically targeted in the healthcare profession and the laws that govern such wrongful activity. If you are receiving this notice as contractor or agent of OMH, you are required to communicate this information to your own employees, contractors and agents.

All OMH contractors, agents and vendors who are required to receive this Notice are responsible for reporting to OMH any suspected violations of the false claims laws, fraud, waste, or abuse, any other suspected unlawful conduct or violations of OMH policies, including the OMH Compliance Policy and Procedure. OMH encourages the reporting of suspected violations to the OMH Medicaid Compliance Officer at 518.486.9821 or Compliance@omh.ny.gov.

II. Federal & New York Laws Relating to Filing False Claims

A. Federal Laws

1. False Claims Act (31 USC § 3729 et seq.)

The False Claims Act (“FCA”) provides, in pertinent part, that:

1) any person who (A) knowingly presents, or causes to be presented, a false or fraudulent claim for payment or approval; (B) knowingly makes, uses, or causes to be made or used, a false record or statement material to a false or fraudulent claim; (C) conspires to commit [the above violations]; . . . or (G) knowingly makes, uses, or causes to be made or used, a false record or statement material to an obligation to pay or transmit money or property to the Government, or knowingly conceals or knowingly and improperly avoids or decreases an obligation to pay or transmit money or property to the Government, is liable to the United States Government for a civil penalty of not less than \$5,000 and not more than \$10,000,¹ plus 3 times the amount of damages which the Government sustains because of the act of that person

(b) For purposes of this section,

(1) the terms “knowing” and “knowingly” (A) mean that a person, with respect to information-- (i) has actual knowledge of the information; (ii) acts in deliberate ignorance of the truth or falsity of the information; or (iii) acts in reckless disregard of the truth or falsity of the information; and (B) require no proof of specific intent to defraud; and

(2) the term “claim” (A) means any request or demand, whether under a contract or otherwise, for money or property and whether or not the United States has title to the money or property, that-- (i) is presented to an officer, employee, or agent of the United States; or (ii) is made to a contractor, grantee, or other recipient, if the money or property is to be spent or used on the Government’s behalf or to advance a Government program or interest, and if the United States Government (I) provides or has provided any portion of the money or property requested or demanded; or (II) will reimburse such contractor, grantee, or other recipient for any portion of the money or property which is requested or demanded; and

(3) the term “obligation” means an established duty, whether or not fixed, arising from an express or implied contractual, grantor-grantee, or licensor-licensee relationship, from a fee-based or similar relationship, from statute or regulation, or from the retention of any overpayment; and

(4) the term “material” means having a natural tendency to influence, or be capable of influencing, the payment or receipt of money or property.

¹ Although the statutory provisions of the False Claims Act authorize a range of penalties of from between \$5,000 and \$10,000, those amounts have been adjusted for inflation and increased by regulation to not less than \$10-781 and not more than \$21,563. 28 CFR § 85.3(a)(9).

While the False Claims Act imposes liability only when the claimant acts “knowingly,” it does not require that the person submitting the claim have actual knowledge that the claim is false. A person, who acts in reckless disregard or in deliberate ignorance of the truth or falsity of the information, also can be found liable under the Act. 31 U.S.C. 3729(b).

In sum, the False Claims Act imposes liability on any person who submits a claim to the federal government or a contractor of the federal government that he or she knows (or should know) is false. An example may be a physician who submits a bill to Medicare for medical services she knows she has not provided. The False Claims Act also imposes liability on an individual who may knowingly submit a false record in order to obtain payment from the government. An example of this may include a government contractor who submits records that he knows (or should know) is false and that indicate compliance with certain contractual or regulatory requirements. The third area of liability includes those instances in which someone may obtain money from the federal government to which he may not be entitled, and then uses false statements or records in order to retain the money. An example of this so-called “reverse false claim” may include a healthcare facility that obtains interim payments from Medicare throughout the year, and then knowingly files a false cost report at the end of the year in order to avoid making a refund to the Medicare or Medicaid program.

In addition to its substantive provisions, the FCA provides that private parties may bring an action on behalf of the United States. 31 U.S.C. § 3730 (b). These private parties, known as “qui tam relators,” may share in a percentage of the proceeds from an FCA action or settlement.

Section 3730(d)(1) of the FCA provides, with some exceptions, that a qui tam relator, when the government has intervened in the lawsuit, shall receive at least 15 percent but not more than 25 percent of the proceeds of the FCA action depending upon the extent to which the relator substantially contributed to the prosecution of the action. When the government does not intervene, section 3730(d)(2) provides that the relator shall receive an amount that the court decides is reasonable and shall be not less than 25 percent and not more than 30 percent.

2. The Program Fraud Civil Remedies Act (31 USC §§ 3801, 3802)

This Federal statute allows for administrative recoveries by federal agencies. If a person submits a claim that the person knows is false or contains false information, or omits material information, then the agency receiving the claim may impose a penalty of up to \$5,000 for each claim. The agency may also recover twice the amount of the claim.

Unlike the False Claims Act, a violation of this law occurs when a false claim is submitted, not when it is paid. Also unlike the False Claims Act, the determination of whether a claim is false, and the imposition of fines and penalties is made by the administrative agency, not by prosecution in the federal court system.

B. New York State Laws

New York State False Claim Laws fall under the jurisdiction of both New York's civil and administrative laws as well as its criminal laws. Some apply to recipient false claims and some apply to provider false claims. Most of these statutes are specific to healthcare or Medicaid. Yet some other crimes that apply to areas of interaction with the government and are also applicable to health care fraud and will be listed in this section.

1. Civil and Administrative Laws

a. New York False Claims Act

The New York False Claims Act is similar to the Federal False Claims Act. It imposes penalties and fines upon individuals and entities who knowingly file false or fraudulent claims for payment from any state or local government, including health care programs such as Medicaid. It also has a provision regarding reverse false claims similar to the federal FCA such that a person or entity will be liable in those instances in which the person obtains money from a state or local government to which he may not be entitled, and then uses false statements or records in order to retain the money.

The penalty for filing a false claim is six to twelve thousand dollars per claim plus three times the amount of the damages which the state or local government sustains because of the act of that person. In addition, a person who violates this act is liable for costs, including attorneys' fees, of a civil action brought to recover any such penalty.

The Act allows private individuals to file lawsuits in state court, just as if they were state or local government parties, subject to various possible limitations imposed by the NYS Attorney General or a local government. If the suit eventually concludes with payments back to the government, the person who started the case can recover twenty-five to thirty percent of the proceeds if the government did not participate in the suit, or fifteen to twenty-five percent if the government did participate in the suit.

b. Social Services Law, Section 145-b - False Statements

It is a violation to knowingly obtain or attempt to obtain payment for items or services furnished under any Social Services program, including Medicaid, by use of a false statement, deliberate concealment or other fraudulent scheme or device. The State or the local Social Services district may recover three times the amount incorrectly paid. In addition, the Department of Health may impose a civil penalty of up to \$10,000 per violation. If repeat violations occur within 5 years, a penalty up to \$30,000 per violation may be imposed if they involve more serious violations of Medicaid rules, billing for services not rendered or providing excessive services.

c. Social Services Law §145-c - Sanctions

If any person applies for or receives public assistance, including Medicaid, by intentionally making a false or misleading statement, or intending to do so, the needs of the individual or that of his family shall not be taken into account for the purpose of

determining his or her needs or that of his family for six months if a first offense, for twelve months if a second offense (or if benefits wrongfully received are at least one thousand dollars but not more than three thousand nine hundred dollars), for eighteen months if a third offense (or if benefits wrongfully received are in excess of three thousand nine hundred dollars), and five years for any subsequent occasion of any such offense.

2. Criminal Laws

a. Social Services Law §145 - Penalties

Any person who submits false statements or deliberately conceals material information in order to receive public assistance, including Medicaid, is guilty of a misdemeanor.

b. Social Services Law § 366-b - Penalties for Fraudulent Practices

- i. Any person who obtains or attempts to obtain, for himself or others, medical assistance by means of a false statement, concealment of material facts, impersonation or other fraudulent means is guilty of a Class A misdemeanor.
- ii. Any person who, with intent to defraud, presents for payment any false or fraudulent claim for furnishing services, knowingly submits false information to obtain greater Medicaid compensation or knowingly submits false information in order to obtain authorization to provide items or services is guilty of a Class A misdemeanor.

c. Penal Law Article 155, Larceny

The crime of larceny applies to a person who, with intent to deprive another of his property, obtains, takes or withholds the property by means of trick, embezzlement, false pretense, false promise, including a scheme to defraud, or other similar behavior. It has been applied to Medicaid fraud cases.

- i. Fourth degree grand larceny involves property valued over \$1,000. It is a Class E felony.
- ii. Third degree grand larceny involves property valued over \$3,000. It is a Class D felony.
- iii. Second degree grand larceny involves property valued over \$50,000. It is a Class C felony.
- iv. First degree grand larceny involves property valued over \$1 million. It is a Class B felony.

d. Penal Law Article 175, False Written Statements

Four crimes in this Article relate to filing false information or claims and have been applied in Medicaid fraud prosecutions:

- i. §175.05, Falsifying business records involves entering false information, omitting material information or altering an enterprise's business records with the intent to defraud. It is a Class A misdemeanor.
- ii. § 175.10, Falsifying business records in the first degree includes the elements of the §175.05 offense and includes the intent to commit another crime or conceal its commission. It is a Class E felony.
- iii. §175.30, Offering a false instrument for filing in the second degree involves presenting a written instrument (including a claim for payment) to a public office knowing that it contains false information. It is a Class A misdemeanor.
- iv. §175.35, Offering a false instrument for filing in the first degree includes the elements of the second degree offense and must include an intent to defraud the state or a political subdivision. It is a Class E felony.

e. Penal Law Article 176 - Insurance Fraud

Applies to claims for insurance payment, including Medicaid or other health insurance and contains six crimes.

- i. Insurance Fraud in the 5th degree involves intentionally filing a health insurance claim knowing that it is false. It is a Class A misdemeanor.
- ii. Insurance fraud in the 4th degree is filing a false insurance claim for over \$1,000. It is a Class E felony.
- iii. Insurance fraud in the 3rd degree is filing a false insurance claim for over \$3,000. It is a Class D felony.
- iv. Insurance fraud in the 2nd degree is filing a false insurance claim for over \$50,000. It is a Class C felony.
- v. Insurance fraud in the 1st degree is filing a false insurance claim for over \$1 million. It is a Class B felony.
- vi. Aggravated insurance fraud is committing insurance fraud more than once. It is a Class D felony.

f. Penal Law Article 177 - Health Care Fraud

This statute, enacted in 2006, applies to health care fraud crimes. It was designed to address the specific conduct by health care providers who defraud the system including

any publicly or privately funded health insurance or managed care plan or contract, under which any health care item or service is provided. Medicaid is considered to be a single health plan under this statute. This law primarily applies to claims by providers for insurance payment, including Medicaid payment, and it includes five crimes:

- i. Health care fraud in the 5th degree is knowingly filing, with intent to defraud, a claim for payment that intentionally has false information or omissions. It is a Class A misdemeanor.
- ii. Health care fraud in the 4th degree is filing false claims and annually receiving over \$3,000 in aggregate. It is a Class E felony.
- iii. Health care fraud in the 3rd degree is filing false claims and annually receiving over \$10,000 in the aggregate. It is a Class D felony.
- iv. Health care fraud in the 2nd degree is filing false claims and annually receiving over \$50,000 in the aggregate. It is a Class C felony.
- v. Health care fraud in the 1st degree is filing false claims and annually receiving over \$1 million in the aggregate. It is a Class B felony.

III. *Whistleblower Protections*

A. Federal False Claims Act (31 U.S.C. § 3730(h))

The Federal False Claims Act (FCA) provides protection to qui tam relators (individuals who commence a False Claims action) who are discharged, demoted, suspended, threatened, harassed, or in any other manner discriminated against in the terms and conditions of their employment as a result of their furtherance of an action under the FCA. 31 U.S.C. § 3730(h). Remedies include reinstatement with comparable seniority as the qui tam relator would have had but for the discrimination, two times the amount of any back pay, interest on any back pay, and compensation for any special damages sustained as a result of the discrimination, including litigation costs and reasonable attorneys' fees.

B. Pilot Program for Enhancement of Employee Whistleblower Protections (41 U.S.C. § 4712)

This statute applies to all employees working for contractors, grantees, subcontractors and subgrantees of Federal contracts and grants. It provides protections for employees who disclose information that the employee reasonably believes is evidence of gross mismanagement of a Federal contract or grant, a gross waste of Federal funds, an abuse of authority relating to a Federal contract or grant, a specific danger to public health or safety, or a violation of law, rule, or regulations related to a Federal contract or grant. The statute provides that employees who make such disclosures may not be discharged, demoted or otherwise discriminated against if the disclosure is made to one of the following:

- A member of Congress or a representative of a committee of Congress

- An Inspector General
- The Government Accountability Office
- A Federal employee responsible for contract or grant oversight or management at the relevant agency
- An authorized official of the Department of Justice or other law enforcement agency
- A court or grand jury
- A management official or other employee of the contractor, subcontractor, or grantee who has responsibility to investigate, discover, or address misconduct.

Any employee who believes he or she has been subjected to retaliation as stated above may submit a complaint to the Inspector General of the governmental agency involved. The employee will have all rights and remedies afforded by Federal law.

C. New York State False Claims Act (State Finance Law § 191)

The New York State False Claims Act also provides protection to *qui tam* relators (individuals who commence a False Claims action) who are discharged, demoted, suspended, threatened, harassed, or in any other manner discriminated against in the terms and conditions of their employment as a result of their furtherance of an action under the Act. Remedies include reinstatement with comparable seniority as the *qui tam* relator would have had but for the discrimination, two times the amount of any back pay, interest on any back pay, and compensation for any special damages sustained as a result of the discrimination, including litigation costs and reasonable attorneys' fees.

D. New York State Labor Law § 740

An employer may not take any retaliatory action against an employee if the employee discloses information about the employer's policies, practices or activities to a regulatory, law enforcement or other similar agency or public official. Protected disclosures are those that assert that the employer is in violation of a law that creates a substantial and specific danger to the public health and safety or which constitutes health care fraud under Penal Law § 177 (knowingly filing, with intent to defraud, a claim for payment that intentionally has false information or omissions). The employee's disclosure is protected only if the employee first brought up the matter with a supervisor and gave the employer a reasonable opportunity to correct the alleged violation. If an employer takes a retaliatory action against the employee, the employee may sue in state court for reinstatement to the same, or an equivalent position, any lost back wages and benefits and attorneys' fees. If the employer is a health provider and the court finds that the employer's retaliatory action was in bad faith, it may impose a civil penalty of \$10,000 on the employer. [Consolidated Laws of the State of New York, Labor \(LAB\)](#)

E. New York State Labor Law § 741

A health care employer may not take any retaliatory action against an employee if the employee discloses certain information about the employer's policies, practices or activities to a regulatory, law enforcement or other similar agency or public official. Protected disclosures are those that assert that, in good faith, the employee believes constitute

improper quality of patient care. The employee's disclosure is protected only if the employee first brought up the matter with a supervisor and gave the employer a reasonable opportunity to correct the alleged violation, unless the danger is imminent to the public or patient and the employee believes in good faith that reporting to a supervisor would not result in corrective action. If an employer takes a retaliatory action against the employee, the employee may sue in state court for reinstatement to the same, or an equivalent position, any lost back wages and benefits and attorneys' fees. If the employer is a health provider and the court finds that the employer's retaliatory action was in bad faith, it may impose a civil penalty of \$10,000 on the employer.