



MARYLAND OFFICE OF THE INSPECTOR GENERAL FOR EDUCATION

INVESTIGATIVE SUMMARY | 24 – 0193 - C

Findings Regarding Alleged Corruption and Bid Manipulation by Kent County Public Schools During Its Use of a Public Auction Platform.

The OIGE received a complaint from a business owner (Complainant) alleging corruption and bid manipulation by a Kent County Public School (KCPS) system on a public auction platform (Auction Site). The Complainant also reported unresponsiveness from a KCPS employee (Employee A) and the swift dismissal of his complaint by the KCPS's Ethics Board.

In early June 2024, the Complainant placed a proxy bid of \$4,350.00 for a 30-year-old forklift listed by the KCPS on the Auction Site. The Auction Site informed the Complainant that the reserve price was not met, but the KCPS was willing to sell the forklift for the proxy bid amount. Although not legally obligated to complete the purchase, the Complainant was advised to contact the KCPS if he wished to proceed.

According to the Complainant, they reached out to Employee A to discuss the transaction and were informed that the highest bid from another party was \$3,800.00. The Complainant attempted to negotiate a lower price, but Employee A indicated she could not authorize a reduction and would consult her supervisor. Following this interaction, the Complainant's calls and messages went unanswered, and he was eventually blocked from bidding on any of the KCPS's items on the Auction Site due to alleged rudeness towards Employee A. The Complainant disputes this characterization and believes the KCPS's refusal to communicate suggests unethical or illegal behavior, though no specific details were provided.

The Complainant informed the OIGE that he believed the KCPS manipulated the bid process, asserting that he should only have to pay the next highest bid of \$3,800.00 instead of his proxy bid of \$4,350.00. The OIGE clarified the Auction Site's proxy bid policy, which automatically increments a bidder's amount to their maximum bid. The Complainant understood this policy but continued to believe the process was manipulated by the KCPS, describing the alleged manipulation as unethical. According to them, it is illegal but without concrete evidence.

In an interview with OIGE, Employee A explained her role in finalizing sale documentation and collecting funds for items sold on the Auction Site. She stated she had no authority to alter sale terms or manipulate bids and confirmed that the forklift remains unsold and in the KCPS's possession. Employee A denied any knowledge of unethical or unlawful activities within the KCPS.

The OIGE's investigative findings indicated that KCPS followed the Auction Site's proxy bid policy and procedures and that there was no evidence of corruption or manipulation by any KCPS staff. The OIGE furthermore confirmed that Employee A's account lacked authority permissions and could not influence bid outcomes.

The OIGE could not substantiate the Complainant's allegations of 1) unethical or illegal behavior by the KCPS and 2) manipulated bids. The OIGE found that the bid process followed established policies and that Employee A's involvement was consistent with their role.

The OIGE has completed its investigation.

Unless otherwise noted, the OIGE applies the preponderance of the evidence standard in determining whether local school system personnel have committed misconduct.