

THE AUDITOR'S REPORT



News & Updates

from the Office of the State Auditor Suzanne M. Bump

Making government work better



Suzanne M. Bump
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Dear Friend,

When you think of an audit, it usually conjures images of spreadsheets and calculations, but perhaps a more appropriate image is that of a roadmap. Our recently released [audit of the Essex Sheriff's Department](#) (SDE) shows why.

The audit, which was requested by Sheriff Kevin Coppinger shortly after he took office, sought to identify areas in the Department that fall short and provides recommendations to improve them. From procurement and financial protections to ensure it was properly compensated for law enforcement details, the audit laid out steps to help the Department improve in these areas.

Like a roadmap, our audit helped the Sheriff's Department go from where it was—with poor protections against waste or abuse and lax oversight—to where it wanted to be—an agency that can make the most of every penny and ensure it is protecting public assets.

After we released the audit, I had the opportunity to travel to the headquarters of the Essex Sheriff's Department in Middleton. While there, Sheriff Coppinger highlighted the ways his agency used our audit to make meaningful improvements to their operations—improvements that will save taxpayer dollars and help the Department work better.

It is never easy asking for an independent review, and Sheriff Coppinger should be commended for doing just that, but more importantly, he should be commended for quickly taking steps to implement our audit's recommendations.

Thank you,

Suzanne M. Bump
Auditor of the Commonwealth

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Auditor Bump recently traveled with Sen. Mike Rodrigues and Rep. Paul Schmid to Westport River Vineyard & Winery, an APR program farm, to discuss recent changes to the program and additional improvement still needed.

OSA Focus: More Than Nostalgia

Over forty years ago, Massachusetts implemented a first-of-its-kind program designed to preserve our state's most productive farmland to ensure it continued to be used for agricultural purposes in perpetuity. It is called the Agricultural Preservation Restriction (APR) program. It allows farmers to enter into a formal agreement with the state in which the government pays for a portion of the cost of the land in exchange for an agreement that the land's agricultural viability is preserved and protected.

Since it was implemented, the APR program has helped to preserve over half-a-million acres of farmland; however, [a recent audit](#) from the Office of State Auditor Suzanne M. Bump found the program has not kept pace with modern trends in agriculture, such as agritourism and other revenue opportunities. In addition, the program has failed to provide adequate oversight to participants to ensure they are abiding by the program's requirements and has not provided enough transparency in its decision-making process.

Auditor Bump recently traveled with Sen. Mike Rodrigues and Rep. Paul Schmid, both of Westport, to Westport River Vineyard & Winery, an APR program farm, to highlight needed improvements to the program. There they also discussed recently adopted changes to the program that provide opportunities to appeal decisions made by the state, requirements for periodic program review, and more clarity on the program requirements. More work is needed though; the audit calls for the program to conduct annual monitoring of participating land and to take steps to ensure it receives available federal funds for the purchase of farmland.

While at the Westport farm, Bump noted that preserving farmland "is about more than nostalgia." It is about ensuring agriculture continues to be a core part of our state's economy and a critical piece of its environment and ecosystem. By improving the APR program, we can do just that.



Auditor Bump recently joined Essex Sheriff Kevin Coppinger for a tour of the Essex Sheriff's Department headquarters and Women's Detox Center in Middleton.

OSA's Work Makes Headlines

[Our view: Good road map for a better sheriff's department](#)

From procurement to police details, this editorial from the *Salem News* notes how our transition audit of the Essex Sheriff's Department provides a clear plan for improvement.

[Auditor: Farm preservation important for economy, environment](#)

A day after releasing an audit calling for the state to improve transparency in its decision-making and increase its monitoring of protected farmland within the state's Agricultural Preservation Restriction (APR) program, Auditor Bump traveled to Westport Rivers Vineyard & Winery to learn about the farmers' experiences with the program, *SouthCoastToday* reports.

[Quincy-based dentist indicted on larceny, fraud charges](#)

The work of the Office of the State Auditor helped bring charges against a Quincy dentist after a [2013 audit found](#) that Dr. Shahrzad Haghayegh-Askarian allegedly billed MassHealth for excessive treatments that were contrary to the agency's regulations, the *Patriot Ledger* reports.

[WRTA addresses problems noted in two-year state audit](#)

The *Worcester Telegram & Gazette* highlights that the Worcester Regional Transit Authority reports taking steps to implement OSA's audit recommendations to improve its financial reporting commitments.

