

Department of Justice
U.S. Attorney's Office
Eastern District of Kentucky

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Tuesday, July 16, 2019

Madison County Woman Agrees to Pay Damages for Submitting False Claims to AmeriCorps Program

LEXINGTON, Ky. – A Madison County woman has agreed to resolve civil allegations that she violated the False Claims Act, a federal law that prohibits the submission of false or fraudulent claims, agreeing to pay the federal government, after admitting that she falsified timesheets that caused her to wrongfully receive federal funds from the AmeriCorps Program.

The Madison County woman was a member of AmeriCorps, a national service initiative administered by the Corporation for National and Community Service (CNCS). AmeriCorps is a federally funded network of national service programs that address critical community needs like increasing academic achievement, mentoring youth, fighting poverty, sustaining national parks, preparing for disasters, and more. Frequently, federal AmeriCorps grants are provided to state service commissions, tribes, and local, regional, and national organizations to execute these service initiatives. Members of AmeriCorps commit to service for a period of three months to a year in exchange for a living allowance, educational benefits, and other perks.

The PartnerCorps Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics (“PartnerCorps STEM”) AmeriCorps program, operated by Berea College, is a recipient of AmeriCorps grants. PartnerCorps STEM increases student competency in STEM fields through the mentorship and tutoring of high school students in Madison County, Kentucky. The AmeriCorps members who provide these services receive a monthly living allowance for the service performed.

During the 2017-2018 school year, the AmeriCorps member in question committed to service with PartnerCorps STEM. In exchange for her tutoring and mentoring activities at Madison Southern High School (“MSHS”), the member received a monthly living allowance. From January to March 2018, however, the member did not report to her service site or perform any AmeriCorps service; nevertheless, she submitted six timesheets falsely representing that she had performed her duties at MSHS during the relevant time period. Relying on the false timesheets, PartnerCorps STEM provided the member with a CNCS-funded living allowance in January 2018 and February 2018. Further, when PartnerCorps STEM realized that the AmeriCorps member had stopped reporting to serve and withheld her living allowance for March 2018, the AmeriCorps member escalated her fraud scheme by inquiring as to the status of her missed payment, knowing that her timesheets were false and that she had performed no service during that time frame.

“When false claims are submitted to national service programs, it depletes their limited resources and undermines their valuable work, which is designed to benefit and improve our communities,” said Robert

M. Duncan, Jr., United States Attorney for the Eastern District of Kentucky. “In this case, each false timesheet resulted in more than simply the loss of money; it caused a loss of valuable high school tutoring, increased college opportunities within a community, and the promotion of critical academic fields that support and benefit our entire community. We recognize these cases have both monetary and non-monetary impacts and we remain committed to serving as stewards for the integrity of these important programs.”

“AmeriCorps’ purpose is to engage young adults in serving their communities, not stealing from them,” said Inspector General Deborah J. Jeffrey. “We applaud our DOJ partners for recognizing that timesheet fraud is serious and that it has an even greater impact when it involves national service. The loss in these cases is measured not only by the theft of taxpayer funds, but in the loss of critical assistance to our at-risk communities. We will continue to vigorously pursue timesheet fraud against CNCS programs and its beneficiaries.”

The Corporation for National and Community Service, Office of Inspector General, performed the investigation, and Assistant United States Attorney Mary Melton handled the matter for the United States.