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Hunter College Whistleblower: Suit Was to End 'Luxury Vacations, Fraud Schemes, Bloated Bonuses'

By Theresa Defino

To those who say whistleblowers are only interested in the money a settlement can bring, meet Devin English. An assistant professor in the Department of Urban-Global Public Health in Rutgers' School of Public Health, English made headlines when his 2019 qui tam suit against Hunter College and a former professor was recently settled.

Taken together, Hunter and City University of New York (CUNY) of which it is a part, and the professor paid the United States government more than a half-million dollars and admitted to violating the False Claims Act (FCA) related to misuse of NIH funds awarded to Hunter's Center for HIV Educational Studies (CHEST). English hopes the settlement will shine a light on misspending—and inadequate spending—for those “devastated” by HIV/AIDS.

“While this legal action represents a critical step in holding their fraud accountable, we must do more to make sure federal HIV/AIDS resources are going to those who need them most,” English told RRC. “Institutions have an ethical responsibility to ensure that grant funds, particularly those meant to treat illness among marginalized communities, actually go towards that vital work.”

The Southern District of New York (SDNY), which handled the case, requires individuals and entities to admit wrongdoing as a condition for settlement, an SDNY spokesperson confirmed in an email to RRC.

Hunter College and former professor Jeffrey T. Parsons-Hietikko agreed to pay the government \$200,000 and \$375,000, respectively, SDNY announced Jan. 30.^[1] SDNY included the settlement agreements between the parties as well as the original complaint in its announcement. Parsons-Hietikko was a psychology professor and director of CHEST. Hunter's settlement agreement does not indicate if the \$200,000 includes a penalty. According to Parsons-Hietikko's settlement agreement, half of his payment is restitution; half appears to be a penalty.

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