

John Drew Family Biz Answers House Speaker's Request for Spending on Hidden State Payment

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A psychological firm operating in Fernandina Beach has plans to ask the legislature to increase its \$1 million budget for a mental healthcare screening program to expand a three-county launch in Nassau, Duval, and Clay to a state-wide program over coming years.



Florida State University has stopped payments to Florida Psychological Associates – for now.

According to Florida Psychological Associates, the company's early detection program, which is accessed through a tablet application called CELPHIE, would be used by schools and jails throughout Florida to assess the mental health needs of students and detainees.

CELPHE is funded through a state appropriation for Florida State University. The funding request was quietly tucked into the school's College of Medicine budget at the request of State Senator Aaron Bean and was expected to be a recurring \$1

million funding source. Mr. Bean is good friends with the company's owner Catherine Drew and her husband John Drew, who is the Nassau County Tax Collector.

Cash for FPA came to a halt in March and it is not clear if the dollars are coming back. Funding for FPA is not in the legislative budget for the upcoming fiscal year.

House Speaker Richard Corcoran asked the university to stop paying FPA until he can determine if the money has been well spent. He asked the school and the company for detailed financial records. FPA complied with the request late last week. FSU complied earlier this month.

Records show the company has received \$590,191 as of March. While the company, through its attorney, does not account for all expenditures, it reported spending on salaries, software

licenses, and supplies (\$367,074), costs for general and administrative overhead (\$44,874) and rent (\$8,750).

FSU Spokesperson Doug Carlson said by phone Monday morning the school cannot afford to fund the project without money from Tallahassee.

"We don't have the money in our budget if the state doesn't want it," he said.

It is unclear what happens next.

The school told Mr. Corcoran in its disclosure that it would return the \$200,000 received for evaluating the program. Mr. Carlson said he did not know if the money has been sent back or whether the contract would be cancelled. Under terms of the agreement, signed July 1, FPA was scheduled to receive \$800,000, the bulk of the \$1 million appropriation.

With continued funding in limbo, there are questions about CELPHIE's cost and effectiveness from the owner of a screening company in Virginia with ties to the Nassau County School Board and, in turn, Catherine Drew.

During contract negotiations, FSU asked Ms. Drew to provide information and costs for a similar program. She cited Collaborative Planning Group's screening program known as SBIRT and included side-by-side comparisons of user fees and licensing costs.

According to Ms. Drew, the company is used in Florida schools, focuses on substance abuse, and is more expensive. Ms. Drew did not disclose that Collaborative Planning Group has a multi-year consulting contract with the district to evaluate the local \$2.3 million Climate Transformation grant, a program Dr. Drew was hired to oversee.

Reached by phone last week, founder and President Keri-Lyn Coleman said \$1 million to evaluate 7,100 people is "way beyond" what she would have charged. "What does that work out to? You could get treatment for all those people for \$1 million," she said.

Ms. Coleman said her company's online, tablet-enabled database and reporting tool is used in 11 states, including Florida, and has been used by the World Health Organization and Boston Children's Hospital. Ms. Coleman said a mental health component is not part of SBIRT – Screening, Brief, Intervention, and Referral to Treatment – because depression and anxiety are difficult to screen. "There isn't a protocol in place like (there is) for drug treatment," she said.

Ms. Coleman said Ms. Drew has seen SBIRT in action, though she has not seen CELPHIE. She said she spoke with Ms. Drew about setting up a system for FPA after Ms. Drew contacted one



Nassau County Tax Collector John Drew also does work for his wife's company Florida Psychological Associates. The company received \$1 million from the state. His friend State Sen. Aaron Bean asked for the money.

of her employees in January 2016 to ask about development. "I believe she thought the worker was a consultant. Fortunately, he was honest and told me," she said. "We could have done the work for her in no time." She said Ms. Drew declined to work with the company.

Ms. Drew, her representative, and Mr. Drew did not respond to repeated requests for comment.

Ms. Drew received a courtesy faculty position at FSU to be eligible for the funding, said documents. She disclosed a conflict of interest but specifics are difficult to find. Ms. Drew told the company she is the sole owner of FPA and said, when pushed for disclosure, that FPA is owned by American Screener Company, LLC. The company is registered in Nevada, according to state records. Attorney Clyde Davis, who also represents the Port of Fernandina and is partners with FPA Attorney Brett Steger, is listed as the company's manager.



Catherine Drew, CEO of Florida Psychological Associates. She has also received no-bid contracts with the school board and Nassau County court.

The documents from FPA and FSU reveal wide gaps between what the company said it would do for the money and what it has delivered. There was also broad confusion during contract negotiations and FSU's internal reviews, according to emails.

While the company promised to screen 7,100 students and jail detainees in Nassau, Duval, and Clay counties over the first year, it performed less than 250 screenings by February (they were scheduled to conduct 3,800 screenings by then) – and all of them were done in Nassau County schools. According to company reports, three students were screened in December. Holiday vacation, they reasoned.

During contract talks last summer, FSU's Associate Dean for Finance and Administration Sharon Woodall, told Ms. Drew she would be held to her benchmarks. "Whatever numbers you set for this will be the measure we will ask you (to) certify that you have attained," she said.

FSU's Carlson called the 7,100 performance threshold "aspirational."

"Failure to perform that number (of screenings) would not violate the contract," he said by phone last week. "We knew the first year would be tough."

Still, FSU had concerns in December and January, he said, and requested a site visit. On Feb. 9, two FSU officials, including the Chair of the Department of Behavioral Sciences Leslie Beitsch, traveled from Tallahassee to FPA's Fernandina Beach office. He came away from the

meeting believing that progress could be made, according to a Feb. 14 email. "We look forward to a very successful project and partnership," he said.

Screenings at jails have not started but could be close to launching in Nassau County, said documents. FPA emails said the company has contacted representatives at Clay and Duval counties about the screenings about three weeks ago.

In a letter to Mr. Corcoran, Mr. Steger said problems with the school's Internal Review Board caused delays with screenings at the jail. The review board, which separately assessed student and detainee screenings, does not review for scientific merit but determines whether the program is okay for human testing.



State Sen. Aaron Bean.

On Oct. 3, FSU reviewer Brad Schmidt was critical of FPA's proposal. "Although I think this is a worthwhile study that is benign, the problem as a reviewer is that you can't tell what is happening because the proposal has been so poorly written/organized," he said.

About a week later, after revisions, progress is made. "From my perspective, things look good now," he said on Oct. 11.

Mr. Steger said FPA has attempted to screen 100 percent of students in Nassau County but FPA emails said 3,500 permission slips were sent out and small numbers have been returned. An instructor in Yulee said only one student turned in a permission slip and that was one more than any other instructor had received. There was a suggestion, he said, to 'grade' the return of permission slips.

CELPHE is an acronym for Client-Entered Likelihood of Psychological Health Impairment Evaluation. The company calls it a "novel, computerized measure designed to screen children (ages 8 to 18) that are in need of mental health services."

Dr. Drew, who is paying herself more than \$82,000, said in documents the assessment takes five minutes to complete and includes 26 questions, primarily in a Yes or No format. Students are immediately scored as having Low, Moderate or High mental health needs.

Letters go out to parents with the names of a few local therapists. In each letter, FPA's name is at the top of the list. The company name is also featured on the letterhead – next to FSU's – and the text includes a request to call FPA with any questions. As effective as mental health screening may be, the letter can be viewed as an effective way to drum up new business. Starting Point Behavior Health, which is also listed, says it has not received any referrals from the program. "Not yet," said Executive Director Laureen Pagel by phone earlier this month.

One parent, whose name was redacted from documents, asked if the results are part of my child's record. Perhaps a conversation took place by phone. The reply was not written down. But there is information elsewhere in documents that said screening results will not be included in school records.

The letters offered tips to improve mental health, such as sleep more, eat better, and get more exercise. In one email, a worker wants to be reimbursed for buying donuts and bringing them to schools to celebrate participation in the program.

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