

Florida State University to return more money from secret \$1 million appropriation

Arek Sarkissian , arek.sarkissian@naplesnews.com; 850-559-7620

Published 3:32 p.m. ET July 14, 2017 | Updated 7:09 p.m. ET July 14, 2017



(Photo: Aneese, Getty Images/iStockphoto)

TALLAHASSEE - Florida State University will return more than expected from a \$1 million grant lawmakers secretly tucked inside the university's budget for the friend of a state senator, according to a letter from FSU President John Thrasher.

Thrasher, in a letter Tuesday to state House Speaker Richard Corcoran, (https://assets.documentcloud.org/documents/3895043/The-letter-FSU-President-John-Thrasher-sent-to_pdf) promised to return \$310,000 from the \$1 million that Florida Psychological Associates received in last year's \$82.3 billion state budget. The firm, based in Fernandina Beach, received the money with the help of state Sen. Aaron Bean, who is a longtime friend of the owner and her husband, Nassau County Tax Collector John Drew.

In April, Thrasher told Corcoran, R-Land O' Lakes, he would return \$200,000 the FSU College of Medicine accepted to cover administrative costs for the program. Corcoran replied that the school should return only the administrative money it did not spend.

In response, Thrasher sent another letter to Corcoran stating he would return the \$210,000 remaining after FSU canceled its contract with the firm. The \$100,000 in unspent administrative money also would be returned to the state's treasury by the end of the month, Thrasher said.

"Although we were willing to return all of the administrative funds, we appreciate your acknowledgement of FSU's work on this program," he wrote. "And we will return the unspent \$100,000 of administrative funds according to your direction."

Language in this year's \$83 billion state budget specifically forbids FSU from providing Florida Psychological Associates any additional money. The firm received the \$1 million to conduct a mental health assessment program on 7,200 people in northeastern Florida. The program should have tested 3,800 people by February, but it had tested only 241.

"We applaud the Legislature for your efforts to ensure all tax dollars are spent wisely and transparently and we are pleased to be part of the process," Thrasher wrote.

The university had given the firm \$590,191 of the \$800,000 it stood to receive before Thrasher ended its contract in April. Corcoran sent the university and the firm a letter on April 10 demanding documents to detail how Florida Psychological Associates spent the money.

Corcoran's demands followed reports by the Naples Daily News that Bean, R-Fernandina Beach, helped the firm secure the money and emails that suggested Bean would help market the program in other states.

Bean has denied any relationship with Florida Psychological Associates.

The firm provided records to Corcoran's office documenting how it spent \$420,699, but they did not account for the remaining \$169,492. Among the expenses was the \$82,141 salary Catherine Drew paid herself.

Read or Share this story: <http://www.naplesnews.com/story/news/politics/2017/07/14/florida-state-university-return-more-money-secret-1-million/479828001/>