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Florida Attorney General's Office News Release

Pinellas County Resident Arrested for Medicaid Provider Fraud



TALLAHASSEE, Fla.—Attorney General Ashley Moody's Medicaid Fraud Control Unit and the St. Petersburg Police Department today arrested a Pinellas County man for willfully and intentionally engaging in Medicaid fraud for more than two years. Willie T. Barnes allegedly received more than $15,000 in Medicaid payments for therapy never provided to clients. Barnes is the owner and operator of Barnes Holistic Counseling Therapies Institute located in St. Petersburg.

Attorney General Ashley Moody said, "Defrauding the Medicaid program for personal gain leaves both patients and the program vulnerable. Patients should be able to trust the medical professionals they receive treatment from without fear of being used to scam the Medicaid program and rip off taxpayers."

The arrest is the result of an investigation conducted by Attorney General Moody's MFCU, with the assistance of the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services' Office of the Inspector General. According to the investigation, Barnes allegedly caused the Florida Medicaid program to be billed for therapy services claimed to be provided to Medicaid recipients by a former employee.

From June 1, 2016 to around Oct. 31, 2018, Barnes allegedly generated service claims for 392 patients using the former employee's information to portray services rendered, when the employee had not. As a result, Barnes received more than $15,000 in payments from the Florida Medicaid program. The investigation also revealed Barnes allegedly offered kickbacks for patient referrals and patient retention, which is prohibited by Medicaid provider fraud statutes.

Barnes is charged with one count of Medicaid provider fraud, a second-degree felony, and one count of scheme to defraud, a third-degree felony. If convicted, Barnes faces up to 20 years in prison and more than $30,000 in fines and restitution. Attorney General Moody’s Office of Statewide Prosecution will prosecute the case.