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PRESS RELEASE

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Project Concern International, a Global Health Non-Profit Organization, Agrees to Pay \$537,500 to Resolve False Claims Act Action

WASHINGTON – Project Concern International (PCI) has agreed to pay the United States \$537,500 to resolve allegations that it knowingly submitted false claims to the United States Agency for International Development (USAID), in PCI’s performance of grants to provide agricultural and other aid to developing countries.

The announcement was made today by U.S. Attorney Matthew M. Graves and Special Agent in Charge Mark Day for the USAID Office of Inspector General (OIG).

“This agreement demonstrates our resolve to hold accountable any organization that mishandles federal funds,” said U.S. Attorney Graves. “Organizations such as PCI are entrusted to provide vital humanitarian assistance to those in need, and the United States will ensure that a violation of that trust will be investigated and prosecuted.”

“This settlement reflects the consequences for submitting false invoices to USAID for work not actually performed,” said USAID OIG Special Agent in Charge Day. “Organizations receiving USAID funds must establish checks and controls in their accounting systems to ensure that fraud schemes like this are detected and disrupted early on. USAID OIG, through its global investigative activities, will continue to work with our partners at the Department of Justice to hold accountable those who, through corruption and fraud, compromise the operations of critical U.S. foreign assistance programs.”

PCI is a global health non-profit organization headquartered in San Diego, California, and operates a second office in Washington, D.C. Based on information from a whistleblower, a review of PCI internal communications and financial records by the U.S. Attorney’s Office and the USAID OIG for the period 2014 to 2016 determined that PCI was improperly shifting costs between projects, and sometimes using USAID grant funds to cover for privately-funded projects.

Specifically, once grant funding for one assistance project was depleted, PCI supervisors would instruct its employees to bill their time or other costs to separate and unrelated USAID grant projects that had money remaining in their accounts, even though those employees did not work on that project. PCI then certified to USAID that it used the grant funds only as allowed under each project.

PCI through its legal counsel, cooperated with the investigation and agreed to settle the matter prior to a determination of liability in the civil case. Under the settlement agreement, PCI agreed to reimburse USAID \$215,000, the estimated amount of mis-charged costs, and an additional multiplier penalty under the False Claims Act of \$322,500, for a total of \$537,500. PCI also agreed to pay the reasonable attorney's fees incurred by the whistleblower.

The investigation in this matter was conducted by USAID OIG and Assistant U.S. Attorney Darrell Valdez of the U.S. Attorney's Office for the District of Columbia.

The case is captioned United States. ex rel. Seims v. Project Concern International, Inc., No. 1-20-cv-0389 (D.D.C.)

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