

Keeping Fraud Out of Research: Government Grant Whistleblower Awarded Over \$200,000

Article By:

Tycko & Zavareei Whistleblower Practice Group

A whistleblower recently played a pivotal role in exposing research misconduct, leading to a \$4 million settlement from [Athira Pharma Inc.](#) under the False Claims Act. This case highlights the importance of safeguarding government-funded research and enforcing transparency in scientific investigations. Whistleblowers contribute to protecting taxpayer dollars, and under the qui tam provision of the False Claims Act, they may be entitled to [15-25%](#) of the government's recovery.

The Case Against Athira Pharma Inc.

The Bothwell, Washington-based biotechnology company allegedly failed to disclose research misconduct to the National Institutes of Health (NIH) and the Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) Office of Research Integrity. Athira's former CEO, Leen Kawas, allegedly manipulated scientific images in her dissertation and published works. These publications were then referenced in multiple grant applications submitted to the NIH, one of which led to a successful grant award in 2019. The timeline of the alleged misconduct spans from January 1, 2016, to June 20, 2021, during which Athira violated its regulatory obligations to disclose these concerns.

The Role of the Whistleblower in Exposing Fraud

Whistleblower Andrew P. Mallon, Ph.D. filed the case under the qui tam provisions of the False Claims Act. The False Claims Act allows private individuals to act on behalf of the U.S. government and bring attention to fraudulent claims submitted to government programs. For his role in uncovering the misconduct, Dr. Mallon is set to receive \$203,434 as part of the settlement.

Taxpayer Dollars and the Impact of Research Misconduct

This case underscores the need for ethical conduct in government-funded research programs. When federal agencies such as the NIH distribute grants, they trust recipients to provide accurate and truthful information. Any form of fraud, including the manipulation of research data, not only undermines the scientific process but also wastes public funds. As the Principal Deputy Assistant Attorney General said about the case, "The partnership between the scientific community and the federal government is built on trust and shared values of ethical scientific conduct."

Why the False Claims Act Matters

The False Claims Act remains one of the U.S. government's most effective tools for recovering taxpayer funds lost to fraud. Originally enacted to combat fraud against military supplies during the Civil War, the False Claims Act has since evolved to encompass broader areas of misconduct, including government research grants, healthcare programs, and other federally funded activities.

© 2025 by Tycko & Zavareei LLP

National Law Review, Volume XV, Number 14

Source URL: <https://natlawreview.com/article/keeping-fraud-out-research-government-grant-whistleblower-awarded-over-200000>