

Alabama man gets settlement in whistleblower lawsuit

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BIRMINGHAM, Ala. — An Alabama man who exposed a former government contractor accused of mishandling background checks for federal job applicants was awarded his share of a \$30 million settlement late last week.

Blake Percival filed a whistleblower lawsuit against United States Investigations Services under the False Claims Act after he was fired in 2011. **Beasley Allen Law Firm** spokesman Conwell Hooper said Percival's \$6 million portion of the settlement was disbursed Friday.

Percival's lawsuit said USIS managers were ordering employees to send the Office of Personnel Management files on job applicants that were incomplete or that hadn't been reviewed at all, a practice that employees called "dumping." USIS field investigators were pressured to meet quotas and make deadlines so the company could continue collecting maximum payments from the U.S. government, the lawsuit said.

Percival refused managers' orders to submit files that hadn't been thoroughly reviewed and asked employees to work overtime to complete them. Percival was fired in June 2011 after being promoted in January of that year. Percival was the company's director of fieldwork services and had been in other leadership positions in Birmingham and Montgomery before then.

The lawsuit said the OPM was the company's main client and USIS sent federal officials at least 665,000 personnel files that had been marked as complete between March 2008 and September 2012. The U.S. Department of Justice intervened in the lawsuit in October 2013.

Department of Justice officials said in an August news release that USIS did background checks for OPM between 1996 and September 2014. The company was responsible for reviewing the backgrounds of classified data leaker Edward Snowden and Navy Yard shooter Aaron Alexis.

Incomplete files were submitted for candidates seeking jobs with numerous federal agencies including the Department of Justice, the Department of Homeland Security, the Department of Health and Human Services and others, according to the lawsuit.

Altegrity, the parent company of USIS, filed for bankruptcy in February and federal officials said company officials agreed to forgo their right to collect \$30 million in outstanding payments to settle the lawsuit.

Percival said Monday that he felt relieved and vindicated.

"For the last four-and-a-half years we've lived paycheck to paycheck and we've scraped by

and we've done without, and all of that changed on Friday," said Percival, a father of four who worked several jobs and stocked shelves at a grocery store after he was fired.

Percival said his most recent job was as a legal assistant for the Social Security Administration in Montgomery but he resigned and put down a deposit on an RV.

"We plan to leave the area shortly after New Year's. Were just going to go out, get on the road, get this behind us and turn the page," Percival said, adding that he also plans to write a book.