

THE UNITED STATES ATTORNEY'S OFFICE  
EASTERN DISTRICT *of* NEW YORK

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Department of Justice  
U.S. Attorney's Office  
Eastern District of New York

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Tuesday, October 6, 2020

## **Former Stony Brook University Professor Sentenced to Prison for Stealing Cancer Research Funds**

### **Dr. Geoffrey Girnun Used Government Funds to Make Personal Mortgage and Tuition Payments**

Geoffrey Girnun, a former Associate Professor and cancer researcher at Stony Brook University's Department of Pathology of Medicine, was sentenced today by United States District Judge Denis R. Hurley via videoconference to one year and a day in prison for theft of government funds related to a grant he received to research the effect of certain molecules on cancer. Girnun pleaded guilty in January 2020 and pursuant to his plea agreement agreed to forfeit \$225,000 and resign from his position at Stony Brook University. The Court also ordered restitution to be paid to the National Institutes of Health (NIH) and Stony Brook University in the amount of \$225,000.

Seth D. DuCharme, Acting United States Attorney for the Eastern District of New York, William F. Sweeney, Jr., Assistant Director-in-Charge, Federal Bureau of Investigation, New York Field Office (FBI), and Scott J. Lampert, Special Agent-in-Charge, Department of Health and Human Services, Office of Inspector General (HHS-OIG), announced the sentence.

"The defendant's theft of cancer research funds undermined the important mission of the National Institute of Health, Stony Brook University and his fellow researchers, who are dedicated to curing this deadly illness," stated Acting United States Attorney DuCharme. "In connection with today's sentence, which provides punishment for his offense, the defendant also will be required to pay back every penny he diverted from the fight against cancer."

"Stealing cancer research funds solely to line your own pockets is an outrageous crime. Today's sentence demonstrates that society will not tolerate fraudsters like Dr. Girnun, who will pay for his greed-fueled scheme," stated HHS-OIG Special Agent-in-Charge Lampert. "We will continue to work with our law enforcement partners to investigate such fraud and bring perpetrators to justice."

In approximately 2013 and 2017, respectively, Girnun formed two sham companies, Atlas Metabolomics, LLC (Atlas) and Empyrean Biosciences, LLC (Empyrean) that purportedly provided

research items and equipment for the defendant's cancer-related research projects. From approximately December 2013 to approximately September 2019, Girnun submitted fraudulent electronic invoices to Stony Brook University for payment to the sham companies for equipment, goods and services that were never received or provided. Stony Brook University then used NIH and the university's grant and foundation funds to pay the sham companies over \$200,000. Girnun withdrew the fraudulently obtained grant funds from Atlas and Empyrean's bank accounts and used the money for personal expenses, including payments toward the mortgage on his residence and tuition for his children.

The government's case is being handled by the Office's Long Island Criminal Division. Assistant United States Attorney Erin E. Argo is in charge of the prosecution. Assistant United States Attorney Madeline O'Connor of the Office's Civil Division is handling forfeiture matters.

**The Defendant:**

GEOFFREY GIRNUN

Age: 49

Woodmere, New York

E.D.N.Y. Docket No. 19-CR-416 (DRH)

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**Topic(s):**

Financial Fraud

**Component(s):**

USAO - New York, Eastern

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