

Company sued in prison bribery scheme to pay state \$2M

By JEFF AMY
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JACKSON, Miss. (AP) — A company that made drug testing cups involved in Mississippi's prison bribery scandal will pay the state \$2 million.

Alere, the parent company of Branan Medical Corp., agreed Tuesday to settle a lawsuit without admitting wrongdoing. Attorney General Jim Hood said in a statement that the amount "effectively" recovers what the state spent on the cups and any profits Branan made.

Hood in February sued 22 people and companies associated with the bribery scheme in 11 separate lawsuits, saying they should repay more than \$800 million they received from the state because of bribes taken by Corrections Commissioner Christopher Epps. Alere is the first company to settle.

Texas drug-testing supplier Mark Longoria pleaded guilty in August to a felony charge of conspiracy to commit bribery in sales of Branan cups. He was sentenced to five years in prison.

Longoria told the judge that he sought the Mississippi contract and ultimately agreed to bribe Epps because he was on the verge of losing his sales job with Branan after its buyout by Alere, meaning his only income would be from Drug Testing Corp., previously a sideline business.

The CEO of Drug Testing Corp., Longoria admitted he paid nearly \$230,000 to Mississippi businessman Cecil McCrory for his work helping to secure \$782,000 in sales of drug testing cups in 2013 and 2014. Longoria has said he found out during the contract that McCrory was kicking back \$60,000 to Epps but did nothing to stop it. Prosecutors said he may have known from the beginning.

Alere, based in Waltham, Massachusetts, didn't immediately respond to an email on Thursday seeking comment.

Hood said at the time that he believed evidence turned up in the federal criminal prosecutions showed that some companies knew of the bribes. The companies have generally denied knowing about the bribes and no executives of large companies have yet faced charges.

The settlement says Alere immediately stopped paying consultants such as McCrory after it bought Branan in 2012.

“They were one of the first companies to approach our office seeking settlement in this case,” Hood said in a statement. “Due to their cooperation, we have quickly resolved this matter.”

The suits are being pursued by a group of private lawyers, including prominent Lexington plaintiff’s lawyer **Don Barrett**, on behalf of the state.

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