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NEWS



## AUTISM RESEARCHER INDICTED FOR STEALING GRANT MONEY

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### *Thorsen Allegedly Absconded With Over \$1 Million*

ATLANTA, GA - POUL THORSEN, 49, of Denmark, has been indicted by a federal grand jury on charges of wire fraud and money laundering based on a scheme to steal grant money the CDC had awarded to governmental agencies in Denmark for autism research.

United States Attorney Sally Quillian Yates said of the case, "Grant money for disease research is a precious commodity. When grant funds are stolen, we lose not only the money, but also the opportunity to better understand and cure debilitating diseases. This defendant is alleged to have orchestrated a scheme to steal over \$1 million in CDC grant money earmarked for autism research. We will now seek the defendant's extradition for him to face federal charges in the United States."

"Stealing research grant money to line his pockets, as Poul Thorsen stands accused of here today, cheats U.S. taxpayers and will simply not be tolerated," said Derrick L. Jackson, Special Agent in Charge of the Atlanta Region for the Office of Inspector General of the Department of Health & Human Services. "HHS/OIG will continue to work closely with our law enforcement partners to bring these criminals to justice."

Reginael D. McDaniel, Special Agent in Charge of the Atlanta Region for Internal Revenue Service Criminal Investigation said, "Today's global economy demands a high-level coordinated approach by multiple agencies and authorities in the investigation of financial crimes. While schemes often become more sophisticated over time, fortunately, so do our investigative techniques. IRS Criminal Investigation is proud to have shared its hallmark expertise in following the money trail in the scheme alleged in this indictment."

According to United States Attorney Yates, the charges and other information presented in court: In the 1990s, THORSEN worked as a visiting scientist at the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), Division of Birth Defects and Developmental Disabilities, when the CDC was soliciting grant applications for research related to infant disabilities. THORSEN successfully promoted the idea of awarding the grant to Denmark and provided input and guidance for the research to be conducted. From 2000 to 2009, the CDC awarded over \$11 million to two governmental agencies in Denmark to study the relationship between autism and exposure to vaccines, between cerebral palsy and infection during pregnancy, and between childhood development and fetal alcohol exposure. In 2002, THORSEN moved to Denmark and became the principal investigator for the grant, responsible for administering the research money awarded by the CDC.

Once in Denmark, THORSEN allegedly began stealing the grant money by submitting fraudulent documents to have expenses supposedly related to the Danish studies be paid with the grant money. He provided the documents to the Danish government, and to Aarhus University and Odense University Hospital, where scientists performed research under the grant. From February 2004 through June 2008, THORSEN allegedly submitted over a dozen fraudulent invoices, purportedly signed by a laboratory section chief at the CDC, for reimbursement of expenses that THORSEN claimed were incurred in connection with the CDC grant. The invoices falsely claimed that a CDC laboratory had performed work and was owed grant money. Based on these invoices, Aarhus University, where THORSEN also held a faculty position, transferred hundreds of thousands of dollars to bank accounts held at the CDC Federal Credit Union in Atlanta, accounts which Aarhus University believed belonged to the CDC. In truth, the CDC Federal Credit Union accounts were personal accounts held by THORSEN. After the money was transferred, THORSEN allegedly withdrew it for his own personal use, buying a home in Atlanta, a Harley Davidson motorcycle, and Audi and Honda vehicles, and obtaining numerous cashier's checks, from the



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fraud proceeds. THORSEN allegedly absconded with over \$1 million from the scheme.

The indictment charges THORSEN with 13 counts of wire fraud and 9 counts of money laundering. The wire fraud counts each carry a maximum of 20 years in prison, and the money laundering counts each carry a maximum of 10 years in prison, with a fine of up to \$250,000 for each count. The indictment also contains a forfeiture provision seeking forfeiture of all property derived from the offenses, including an Atlanta residence, two cars, and a Harley Davidson motorcycle. In determining the actual sentence, the Court will consider the United States Sentencing Guidelines, which are not binding but provide appropriate sentencing ranges for most offenders.

This case is being investigated by Special Agents of the Office of Inspector General of the Department of Health & Human Services and the Internal Revenue Service Criminal Investigation Division.

Assistant United States Attorneys Stephen H. McClain and Michael J. Brown are prosecuting the case.

Members of the public are reminded that the indictment contains only allegations. A defendant is presumed innocent of the charges and it will be the government's burden to prove a defendant's guilt beyond a reasonable doubt at trial.

For further information please contact Sally Q. Yates, United States Attorney, or Charysse L. Alexander, Executive Assistant United States Attorney, through Patrick Crosby, Public Affairs Officer, U.S. Attorney's Office, at (404) 581-6016. The Internet address for the HomePage for the U.S. Attorney's Office for the Northern District of Georgia is [www.justice.gov/usao/gan](http://www.justice.gov/usao/gan).

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