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## Homewatch Caregivers must return nearly \$70,000 to Western Massachusetts veterans

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**WEST SPRINGFIELD** - A health care company has agreed to pay back nearly \$70,000 to local veterans and their families in connection with a civil settlement with the state Attorney General's office.

Attorney General Martha M. Coakley said complaints about heavy-handed and deceptive marketing tactics by **Homewatch Caregivers** arose in 2007 and her office began investigating, culminating recently in the restitution agreement.

However, a public relations consultant for the local company said the West Springfield entity simply used a marketing plan pitched by their national parent company, which bought into a format by Horizon Care, also a national vendor.

Coakley said the local company feigned being an arm of the U.S. Veterans Administration and offered local veterans a middle man to access "Aid and Attendance" benefits to which they are already qualified.

The benefit allows for ailing vets and their spouses to receive home-based care to assist in eating, bathing, dressing and similar needs. In some cases, Homewatch assisted consumers in getting those services but would at times collect too much or represent that veterans needed to go in to their own pockets for Homewatch's services.

The company will not face criminal charges, Coakley said.

"We believe their marketing was unfair and deceptive but not necessarily criminal," she said, adding that 18 consumers will receive settlements ranging from \$500 to \$14,000.

Peter and Judy Yaffe, owners of the company, issued a prepared statement in response to a press release by Coakley's office.

"We regret that some of the information supplied to us by Horizon Care Coordinators, consultants to the parent company Homewatch International, and shared with area veterans by our office staff was inaccurate. P.J. Care of Western Massachusetts (Homewatch Caregivers) has been in business since 2002 providing exceptional home care to hundreds of area residents in the area of senior, post surgical and chronic condition care. We remain committed to high quality home care provided by experienced and trained caregivers in helping people in Western Massachusetts."

The statement continued, "Information about (the Aid and Attendance) program was supplied by our national franchiser, Homewatch International and Horizon Care Coordinators ... As a result of this, in 2007, P.J. Care joined with Homewatch International and 14 other national franchisees in successfully suing Horizon Care Coordinators for the misleading and false information they provided and that we, and their national franchisees, unwittingly shared with area veterans."

Coakley said her office has focused on Internet insurance card scams and similar fraud since state-mandated health insurance was initiated.