

Office of Attorney General Terry Goddard



STATE OF ARIZONA
DEPARTMENT OF LAW
1275 W. WASHINGTON STREET
PHOENIX, ARIZONA 85007-2926
WWW.AZAG.GOV

ANDREA M. ESQUER
PRESS SECRETARY
PHONE: (602) 542-8019
CELL PHONE: (602) 725-2200

Terry Goddard Announces \$325,000 Settlement with Tucson College

(Phoenix, Ariz. – March 19, 2008) Attorney General Terry Goddard today announced a \$325,000 settlement with Tucson College, a private vocational school owned by Tucson-based Southwest Business Colleges, Inc. The settlement resolves a lawsuit alleging deceptive practices, representations and advertising in connection with the school's Criminal Justice Program, from August 2006, when the new program started, through June 2007.

The settlement requires Tucson College to fully refund \$175,978 in student loans and enrollment payments for all 57 students who enrolled in the Criminal Justice Program. Tucson College will pay an additional \$150,000 to the Attorney General's Office for consumer fraud education, attorneys' fees and investigation costs.

"This settlement helps make the students who enrolled in this program whole again by refunding the loans and the money that was paid by the students to attend this program," Goddard said. "These were students taking steps to improve their lives and their communities by pursuing a career in law enforcement. This settlement sends a strong message that our vocational colleges and other schools in Arizona must advertise truthfully."

In 2006 and 2007, Tucson College enrolled 57 students in a new nine-month Criminal Justice Program and billed approximately \$10,000 per student. Most students took out student loans to pay their fees. In 2007, after the Attorney General began investigating complaints filed with the Office, the school temporarily stopped enrolling students in the Criminal Justice Program and most of the remaining Criminal Justice students withdrew. Some students who withdrew have already had their loans fully or partially refunded. The school will now pay or refund the rest of the \$175,978 still owed.

According to court documents, Tucson College allegedly misrepresented that its Criminal Justice Program provided the only professional and required training needed to qualify graduates for entry-level careers as law enforcement officers, including probation, police and corrections. The college also deceptively misrepresented job requirements. Arizona law enforcement agencies have significant minimum qualification and training requirements, including completion of the Arizona Peace Officer Standards Training (AZPOST) academy.

In addition, it was alleged that Tucson College:

- Enrolled students who were ineligible for law enforcement careers due to their age or for background reasons, and the school failed to inform students about such requirements.

- Led students to believe that its credits would transfer to local colleges or universities when in fact they did not transfer.
- Enrolled high school drop-outs who were ineligible to enroll or graduate under the Criminal Justice Program requirements.
- Encouraged students to take out loans which encumbered them with significant debt for a program that did not provide any tangible benefit toward obtaining the advertised career opportunities, and later sent the students' delinquent accounts to collections.

The settlement does not constitute an admission of any wrongdoing by Tucson College. Under the settlement, the school agreed to:

- Stop representing that it offers the only professional training necessary to become a law enforcement officer and stop misrepresenting minimum job requirements or disqualifying factors for law enforcement officer careers.
- Give students written notice that certain minimum job qualification requirements and disqualifying factors exist for law enforcement officer careers.
- Stop representing that Tucson College credits are transferable unless it knows that specific colleges accept its credits.
- Prominently disclose in enrollment contracts that students should not assume credits will transfer to schools such as Pima College or the University of Arizona.
- Stop recruiting ineligible students to enroll in the Criminal Justice program.

The settlement, in the form of a consent judgment, is subject to approval by the Pima County Superior Court. Assistant Attorney General Vince Rabago handled this case.

If you believe you have been a victim of fraud, please contact the Attorney General's Office in Phoenix at 602.542.5763; in Tucson at 520.628.6504; or outside the Phoenix and Tucson metro areas at 1.800.352.8431. To file a complaint in person, the Attorney General's Office has 26 satellite offices throughout Arizona with volunteers available to help. Locations and hours are posted on the Attorney General's Web site at www.azag.gov.

###