

Haven House operator to repay Suffolk \$546G

Newsday originally published by April 27, 2013 by Rick Brand

A homeless shelter operator has dropped its lawsuit against Suffolk County and agreed to repay \$546,000 that the county comptroller found was misspent.

Haven House/Bridges Inc. has signed an agreement permitting the nonprofit agency to repay the county \$400,000 over the next five years. Since the audit by Comptroller Joseph Sawicki, released last June, the county has recouped \$140,000 by withholding \$20,000 a month in payments for the ongoing contract.

"This agreement finalizes the audit for county taxpayers and substantiates our findings," said Sawicki. "At the same time, it ensures that Haven House will continue to provide much-needed services to the homeless in our county."

Bruno LaSpina, chief executive of Haven House, did not return calls for comment Friday. In the past, he has called the audit one-sided and said it never found any wrongdoing, self-dealing or instances in which services were not delivered properly.

Haven House had sued the county seeking to put aside the findings of the audit and to stop the county from withholding money. Settlement talks occurred after Presiding Officer William Lindsay (D-Holbrook) moved to mediate the dispute.

The audit for the year 2005 disallowed nearly 25 percent of the \$2.2 million the Brentwood-based operator billed the county for housing homeless adults and families in a half dozen centers in Brentwood and Huntington. Haven House also runs four emergency homeless shelters in Huntington Station.

The largest disallowance was \$216,000 for improperly permitting employees to sleep during overnight shifts, even though the agency had agreed to provide 24-hour supervision.

The audit also disallowed \$8,400 for the lease, maintenance and insurance on a Jaguar that LaSpina used.