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AmeriDebt founder gets prison for concealing fund

The founder of Germantown-based AmeriDebt has been sentenced to prison for concealing assets during court proceedings against the now-defunct debt-counseling company.

Andris Pukke was ordered to serve 18 months in prison, according to Marcia Murphy, spokeswoman for the U.S. Attorney's Office in Maryland.

He pleaded guilty to obstruction of justice in January. Court records say he deliberately transferred millions of dollars in assets to his father, estranged wife and girlfriend in order to conceal them from authorities after AmeriDebt was accused of cheating debtors.

AmeriDebt was intended to help people lower payments and receive counseling. It became one of the country's largest debt-counseling services before the Federal Trade Commission filed a 2003 lawsuit, accusing Pukke of funding a lavish lifestyle for himself by charging debtors \$172 million in hidden fees.

A 2006 settlement with the FTC required him to turn over all assets to a \$35 million restitution fund to pay back the victims. Prosecutors said he lied about and concealed assets to avoid doing so.

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