



Justice Center for the Protection of People With Special Needs

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Northpointe Council Staff Charged with Rape and Sexual Abuse *Case being prosecuted by the Justice Center*

Niagara Falls, NY – NYS Justice Center for the Protection of People with Special Needs Special Prosecutor Patricia E. Gunning today announced indictments charging two Niagara County women with felony rape counts for sexually abusing men in their care while employed by Northpointe Council's First Step Chemical Dependency Crisis Center in Niagara Falls.

Candace Seelbinder (DOB: 04/06/81) of Niagara Falls was charged with:

- Two counts of Rape in the Third Degree, a class "E" felony;
- Two counts of Sexual Abuse in the Second Degree, a class "A" misdemeanor; and
- Two counts of Sexual Misconduct, a class "A" misdemeanor.

Jessica Griffin (DOB: 09/19/77) of Tonawanda was charged with:

- One count of Rape in the Third Degree, a class "E" felony;
- One count of Criminal Sex Act in the Third Degree, a class "E" felony;
- One count of Sexual Abuse in the Second Degree, a class "A" misdemeanor; and
- Two counts of Sexual Misconduct, a class "A" misdemeanor.

Seelbinder, a Licensed Practical Nurse and Griffin, a Credentialed Alcoholism and Substance Abuse Counselor, have been terminated from their positions. They were arraigned before the Honorable Sara Sheldon of Niagara County Court. Bail was set at \$15,000 for Seelbinder and \$5,000 for Griffin. Both defendants are due back in court on July 13, Seelbinder before Judge Sheldon and Griffin before the Honorable Matthew J. Murphy, III. Assistant Special Prosecutor Mary-Jean Bowman is prosecuting the cases.

The defendants were arrested after an investigation conducted by the Justice Center, with the assistance of the Niagara Falls Police Department, found the women allegedly had sexual intercourse with and committed sexual abuse against males at the facility. Sex crimes under the state penal law include sexual contact of any kind between an employee and a resident, when the employee has reason to know the individual is a resident or inpatient at a facility operated, licensed or certified by the Office of Alcoholism and Substance Abuse Services (OASAS).

"All workers at treatment facilities, in particular licensed professionals, who violate their obligations to their patients by engaging in sexual behavior with them, not only commit criminal

conduct, but their actions can also be detrimental to the success of treatment,” said Special Prosecutor Gunning.

The Justice Center and its statewide hotline and incident reporting system began operations on June 30, 2013. It is staffed 24-hours a day, seven days a week by trained professionals who receive reports of allegations of abuse and neglect of people with special needs. Once a report is received by its Vulnerable Persons Central Register (VPCR) Hotline, it is logged and assessed. Serious cases of abuse or neglect are assigned to the Justice Center’s investigation team or, when appropriate, to a local law enforcement agency for follow-up.

The Justice Center also maintains a statewide registry of all persons who have been found to be responsible for serious or repeated acts of abuse and neglect. Once placed on the registry, known as the “Staff Exclusion List” or SEL, they are prohibited by law from ever working again with people with disabilities or special needs.

Through the services provided by the Justice Center’s Individual and Family Support Unit – victims, their families, personal representatives and guardians receive guidance and information about the reporting and investigation process and support during criminal cases and court proceedings.

Northpoint Council, Inc. is licensed by the Office of Alcoholism and Substance Abuse Services (OASAS). OASAS is one of six state agencies under the jurisdiction of the Justice Center. The Justice Center also oversees certain facilities or programs that are operated, licensed or certified by the Office of Children and Family Services (OCFS), the Office of Mental Health (OMH), the Department of Health (DOH), Office for People With Developmental Disabilities (OPWDD) and the State Education Department (SED).

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Editor’s note: In compliance with Disciplinary Rule 7-107A of the Code of Professional Responsibility, you are advised that a charge is an accusation and that a defendant is presumed innocent until and unless proven guilty.