



Justice Center for the Protection of People With Special Needs

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Unity House Staff Member Pleads Guilty to Inappropriate Contact

*Result of Investigation by the NYS Justice Center
for the Protection of People with Special Needs*

Auburn, NY-- NYS Justice Center for the Protection of People with Special Needs Special Prosecutor Patricia E. Gunning announced the guilty plea of William Sistrunk (DOB: 01/29/52) who was arrested last February on charges he sexually abused a woman receiving services at a community residence operated by Unity House of Cayuga County, Inc. Sistrunk, who was employed as a probation officer in Onondaga County was moonlighting as relief staff at the Auburn facility when the abuse occurred. Sistrunk, of Syracuse, pled guilty to:

- One class A Misdemeanor; and
- Harassment in the second degree, a Violation.

Sistrunk had been charged with engaging in sexual contact. Staff at Unity House, which is licensed by the NYS Office of Alcoholism and Substance Abuse Services (OASAS) are not permitted to have sexual contact with their clients, who are legally unable to consent to such conduct.

The defendant was terminated from both his positions. To spare the victim the rigors of a trial and with the victim's consent, the defendant was sentenced to interim probation for one year. In that time, the defendant agreed to allow the Justice Center to forward the details of his plea to all probation offices to prevent the defendant from being employed as a probation officer in any county. Additionally, the defendant agreed to waive his right to appeal a finding that would bar him from working with any vulnerable New Yorker. The arrest was the result of an investigation by the Justice Center, with assistance from the Auburn Police Department. The case was prosecuted by Justice Center Supervising Assistant Special Prosecutor Jennifer Whitman.

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 (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. 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.

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.

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

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William Sistrunk (DOB: 01/29/52)