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Youth Aide Arrested For Allegedly Strangling Teen at Ulster County Residential Facility

Incident Reported to NYS Justice Center for the Protection of People with Special Needs Hotline

Highland, NY-- NYS Justice Center for the Protection of People with Special Needs Special Prosecutor Patricia E. Gunning announced today that William Spencer (DOB 11/18/63), who is employed as a Youth Division Aide at Highland Residential Center has been arrested for allegedly abusing an adolescent in his care following an investigation conducted by the Justice Center. The facility is operated by the NYS Office of Children and Family Services (OCFS).

The incident first came to the attention of law enforcement officials when a staff member at the facility reported the incident to the Justice Center's Vulnerable Persons Central Register (VPCR) Hotline. A call center representative opened a case tracking file. Justice Center investigators led the investigation and coordinated the arrest with State Police Troop F.

Spencer was arraigned at the Town of Lloyd Justice Court on January 23, 2014 on a Felony Complaint charging him with:

- One count of Strangulation in the second degree, a class "D" Felony; and
- One count of Assault in the third degree, a class "A" Misdemeanor.

According to the complaint, the defendant allegedly strangled the victim causing physical injury. Spencer has been suspended from his position. He was released on his own recognizance and is due back in court on February 13, 2014. The case is being prosecuted by Justice Center Assistant Special Prosecutor Christina Calabrese.

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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.

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