



Justice Center for the Protection of People With Special Needs

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Warren County Caregiver Pleads Guilty to Charges He Left Individuals with Special Needs Unattended in Vehicle

Case investigated and prosecuted by the Justice Center

Glens Falls, NY – NYS Justice Center for the Protection of People with Special Needs Special Prosecutor Patricia E. Gunning announced the guilty plea of a direct care worker who was arrested in April for abandoning four individuals with developmental disabilities in a service van he was driving.

Eric Straight (DOB: 11/12/82) of Glens Falls, was employed at a residential facility operated by Capital District DDSO, and pled guilty in Warren County Court before the Honorable John S. Hall, Jr. to:

- One count of Endangering the Welfare of an Incompetent or Physically Disabled person in the First Degree, a class "E" felony; and
- One count of Endangering the Welfare of an Incompetent or Physically Disabled person in the Second Degree, a class "A" misdemeanor.

The defendant will be placed on interim probation for one year. If successful, he will be permitted to withdraw his felony plea and be sentenced to three years' probation. If the defendant is not successful on interim probation, he faces up to 4 years in prison. The defendant resigned from state employment as a condition of his guilty plea. Justice Center Supervising Assistant Special Prosecutor Rachel Dunn prosecuted the case.

An investigation conducted by the Justice Center, with assistance from the Glens Falls Police Department, found Straight left four people in his care unsupervised during an outing. Straight drove to his residence in Glens Falls where he went inside, leaving the individuals unattended in the van. When one of the individuals left the van and entered a nearby apartment, the occupant called the police. A second individual left the van in search of the person who entered into the apartment. No one was injured.

"This defendant's conduct put these vulnerable individuals at significant risk of danger by leaving them unattended," said Gunning. "And despite the lack of injury, we hope that this defendant and others who would similarly disregard their obligations to protect vulnerable New Yorkers will think twice before doing so."

To raise public awareness about the dangers of leaving individuals with special needs unattended in vehicles, the Justice Center released a [Spotlight on Prevention toolkit](#) designed to

provide safety tips for drivers, transport aides, provider agency personnel and the public to prevent a tragedy from occurring.

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. 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.

Capital District DDSO is operated by the Office for People With Developmental Disabilities (OPWDD). OPWDD 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), the Office of Alcoholism and Substance Abuse Services (OASAS), and the State Education Department (SED).

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.



Eric Straight (DOB: 11/12/82)