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Biondi School Teacher and Aide Arrested for Allegedly Abusing Student

Case Being Prosecuted by NYS Justice Center for the Protection of People with Special Needs

Yonkers, NY-- NYS Justice Center for the Protection of People with Special Needs Special Prosecutor Patricia E. Gunning announced today that Pierre Henry (DOB: 8/23/74) who was employed as a teacher and Michael Holt (DOB: 4/28/68), who was employed as a substitute paraprofessional at the Biondi School at Leake and Watts Services, Inc. have been arrested for allegedly abusing a student following an investigation conducted by the Justice Center. Biondi is a private school approved by the NYS Education Department (SED) to serve students with emotional and behavioral challenges.

The incident first came to the attention of law enforcement officials when it was reported to the Justice Center's Vulnerable Persons Central Register (VPCR) Hotline. A call center representative opened a case tracking file. Justice Center investigators launched an investigation and notified the Yonkers Police Department.

Henry who lives in Danbury, CT and Holt who is from Mt. Vernon were arrested on a Misdemeanor Complaint. Both defendants have been charged with:

- One count of Endangering the Welfare of a Child, a class "A" Misdemeanor;
- One count of Unlawful Imprisonment in the Second Degree, a class "A" Misdemeanor;
- One Count of Menacing in the Third Degree, a class "B" Misdemeanor;
- One Count of Attempted Assault in the Third Degree, a class "B" Misdemeanor; and
- One Count of Harassment in the Second Degree, a Violation.

According to the complaint, the defendants, acting in concert allegedly restrained and struck the victim causing him to cry out in pain. Both defendants were terminated from their positions. 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 (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.

Residential schools and programs overseen by the State Education Department (SED) are under the jurisdiction of the Justice Center. It also oversees certain facilities or programs that are operated, licensed or certified by the Office for People With Developmental Disabilities (OPWDD), the Department of Health (DOH), the Office of Mental Health, (OMH), the Office of Alcoholism and Substance Abuse Services (OASAS), and the Office of Children and Family Services (OCFS).

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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.