



Justice Center for the Protection of People With Special Needs

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Justice Center Special Prosecutor Charges Teaching Assistant with Assaulting and Menacing Two Individuals in his Care

Case Investigated and Prosecuted by the Justice Center

Varick, NY – NYS Justice Center for the Protection of People with Special Needs Special Prosecutor Patricia E. Gunning today announced the arraignment of a Seneca County man on charges he menaced and attempted to assault individuals in his care.

Peter Rokosz (DOB: 9/7/1979) of Seneca Falls was charged with:

- Two counts of Attempted Assault in the Third Degree, a class “B” misdemeanor;
- Two counts of Menacing in the Third Degree, a class “B” misdemeanor; and
- Two counts of Harassment in the Second Degree, a violation.

Rokosz, a Teaching Assistant at Hillside Children's Center (Hillside) in Varick was arraigned on July 13, 2016 before the Honorable David K. Ettman of Varick Town Court. The defendant was released on his own recognizance and is due back in court on August 10, 2016. Rokosz was placed on administrative leave by Hillside during the course of this investigation, which was conducted by the Justice Center, with assistance from the Seneca County Sherriff's Department. Assistant Special Prosecutor Robin Unwin is prosecuting the case.

The defendant is alleged to have wrapped his arm around one victim's head and applied a pressure point to the side of his neck with his other hand leaving a mark on the victim's neck. Later on the same date, the defendant allegedly performed an inappropriate restraint on another service recipient at the facility.

“While there was no serious injury in this case, applying any type of pressure to the neck is a dangerous act which cannot be tolerated,” 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.

Hillside is licensed by the Office of Children and Family Services (OCFS) and the State Education Department (SED). OCFS and SED are among the 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 Alcoholism and Substance Abuse Services (OASAS), the Office of Mental Health (OMH), the Department of Health (DOH), and the Office for People With Developmental Disabilities (OPWDD).

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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.



Peter Rokosz (DOB 9/7/1979)