



# Justice Center for the Protection of People With Special Needs

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## **Erie County Caregiver Arraigned on Charges of Sexual Abuse** *Case Investigated and Prosecuted by the Justice Center*

Williamsville, NY – NYS Justice Center for the Protection of People with Special Needs Special Prosecutor Patricia E. Gunning today announced the arraignment of an Erie County man on charges that he sexually abused an adult female with severe developmental disabilities in his care.

“The defendant in this case is accused of a reprehensible offense -- using his role as a caregiver to prey on a victim, who under the law is incapable to consenting to any sexual act,” said Special Prosecutor Gunning. “The Justice Center will continue to prosecute cases like this to the fullest extent of the law and such action should send a strong message that conduct that violates the health, safety or welfare of people with special needs will not be tolerated.”

George R. West of Williamsville (DOB 04/10/58) has been charged with:

- One count of Endangering the Welfare of an Incompetent or Physically Disabled Person in the First Degree, a class “E” felony;
- One count of Endangering the Welfare of an Incompetent or Physically Disabled Person the Second Degree, a class “A” misdemeanor;
- Four counts of Endangering the Welfare of a Vulnerable Elderly or an Incompetent or Physically Disabled Person, a class “E” felony; and
- Four counts of Sexual Abuse in the Second Degree, a class “A” misdemeanor.

The arrest was the result of a joint investigation conducted by the Town of Amherst Police Department and the Justice Center. West, a direct care staff employee of People Inc., has been placed on administrative leave pending the resolution of this case. The defendant pled not guilty to the charges in Erie County Court before the Honorable J. William Boller. Bail was set at \$15,000 cash. The case is being prosecuted by 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 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

People Inc. is certified 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).

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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.*