



Justice Center for the Protection of People With Special Needs

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Justice Center Instructs SUNY Oneonta Students on Investigating and Prosecuting Crimes Against People with Special Needs

The NYS Justice Center for the Protection of People with Special Needs (Justice Center) recently provided instruction to SUNY Oneonta students about crimes committed against people with special needs and the role the Justice Center plays in investigating and prosecuting those crimes. The agency's experienced investigators made presentations to students in the college's Criminal Justice program as part of the Justice Center's ongoing mission to provide useful information to those who respond to incidents involving people with special needs.

"It is critically important that students studying criminal justice understand that studies have shown that individuals with a developmental disability are four to ten times more likely to be a victim of a crime than others without disabilities," said Justice Center Executive Deputy Director Jay Kiyonaga. "This is why the work of the Justice Center is so important. We set the standard for the reporting of abuse and neglect of vulnerable New Yorkers and we ensure that incidents and crimes are investigated and prosecuted, if appropriate."

The Justice Center's Law Enforcement Training Academy provided information to the students on the scope of the Justice Center's criminal jurisdiction, explained how a "vulnerable person" and "abuse and neglect" are defined by law and what happens when a report of abuse or neglect is made to the Justice Center. The session also covered the important role of caregivers in preventing and reporting suspected abuse and neglect.

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 Justice Center has jurisdiction over six state agencies: the Office for People With Developmental Disabilities (OPWDD), the Office of Mental Health (OMH), the Office of Children and Family Services (OCFS), the Office of Alcoholism and Substance Abuse Services (OASAS), the Department of Health (DOH) and the State Education Department (SED).

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