



## Justice Center for the Protection of People With Special Needs

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### **Unity House Staff Member Arrested for Sex Abuse**

*Incident Reported to the NYS Justice Center for the Protection of People with Special Needs*

Auburn, NY-- NYS Justice Center for the Protection of People with Special Needs Special Prosecutor Patricia E. Gunning announced today that William Sistrunk (DOB: 01/29/52) has been arrested for allegedly sexually abusing a woman receiving services at a community residence operated by Unity House of Cayuga County, Inc. The defendant, who is employed as a probation officer in Onondaga County was moonlighting as relief staff at the Auburn facility when the alleged abuse occurred.

Sistrunk, who is a resident of Syracuse, has been charged with:

- One count of Forcible Touching, a class "A" Misdemeanor;
- One count of Sexual Abuse in the second degree, a class "A" Misdemeanor; and
- One count of Harassment in the second degree, a Violation.

The defendant allegedly placed his hand under the victim's shirt, groped her breast and touched her buttocks. Staff at Unity House, which is licensed by the NYS Office of Alcoholism and Substance Abuse Services (OASAS) are not permitted to have sexual contact with their clients, who are legally unable to consent to such conduct. Sistrunk was terminated from his position at Unity House and has been suspended from his position at the Department of Probation.

The arrest was the result of an investigation conducted by the Justice Center, with assistance from the Auburn Police Department. The case is being prosecuted by Justice Center Assistant Special Prosecutor Deandra Macomber.

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.

OASAS is one of six state agencies under the jurisdiction of the Justice Center. The Justice Center also oversees certain facilities or programs which are operated, licensed or certified by the Office of People With Developmental Disabilities (OPWDD), the Office of Mental Health (OMH), the Office of Children and Family Services (OCFS), the Department of Health (DOH), 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.

William Sistrunk (DOB: 01/29/52)

