



Justice Center for the Protection of People With Special Needs

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Queens Group Home Employee Indicted for Grabbing Resident by Throat *Case being investigated and prosecuted by the Justice Center*

Queens, NY-- NYS Justice Center for the Protection of People with Special Needs Special Prosecutor Patricia E. Gunning today announced a direct support professional employed by Human First, a New York City provider agency that serves individuals with developmental disabilities, was indicted on multiple counts for allegedly grabbing a person in her care by the throat and throwing the victim to the ground.

Rhonda Sumter (DOB: 01/07/74) of Jamaica, Queens was arraigned in Queens County Supreme Court before the Honorable Barry Kron and pleaded not guilty to:

- One count of Endangering the Welfare of an Incompetent or Physically Disabled Person in the First Degree, a class "E" felony;
- One count of Criminal Obstruction of Breathing or Blood Circulation, a class "A" 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.

Sumter was placed on unpaid leave and was released on her own recognizance. She is due back in court on September 19, 2016.

"Applying pressure to a person's neck can very quickly lead to unconsciousness and is potentially lethal," said Special Prosecutor Gunning. "Defendants like Ms. Sumter who choose to attack individuals with special needs in their care will be held accountable."

The charges in this case stem from an incident that occurred in November 2015, in which the defendant is alleged to have grabbed the victim around the neck with both of her hands, pushed the victim's back into a tree and then to the ground until another staff member intervened and pulled the defendant off the victim. The victim suffered redness to the neck and upper back and was treated the next day at a local hospital for pain and released.

The case was investigated by the Justice Center and is being prosecuted by Justice Center Assistant Special Prosecutor Allison Warga.

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. 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.

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 facility where the alleged abuse occurred is licensed 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 Mental Health (OMH), the Office of Children and Family Services, (OCFS), 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.



Rhonda Sumter (DOB: 01/07/74)