



Justice Center for the Protection of People With Special Needs

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE: June 5, 2023
Contact: Christine Buttigieg, Director of Public Information
(518) 949-5621
christine.buttigieg@justicecenter.ny.gov

Justice Center Surpasses 2.5M Preemployment Checks as Agency Marks 10-Year Anniversary

The Justice Center for the Protection of People with Special Needs has surpassed a milestone in its work to protect vulnerable individuals from abuse and neglect just as the agency marks its 10-year anniversary.

The Justice Center is announcing the completion of more than 2.5 million Staff Exclusion List (SEL) checks. The SEL contains the names of nearly 900 people who have been found responsible for committing the worst acts of abuse and neglect. They are banned *for life* from working in settings under Justice Center jurisdiction. Even so, there have been nearly 300 times these same, banned individuals have applied for a job working with people with special needs. The Justice Center's SEL check is what stopped them from gaining employment and access to individuals particularly vulnerable to dangerous and potentially deadly treatment.

The milestone comes as the Justice Center marks 10 years of service. The agency started operations on June 30, 2013. At the time, disturbing articles had exposed a system rife for abuse with no accountability. Staff members facing serious allegations were moved from job to job, putting countless potential victims at risk.

New York took bold action, creating the nation's only agency dedicated to independently investigating alleged abuse and neglect for more than a million residents. In a decade of operations, the Justice Center has investigated nearly 100,000 cases, recommended innumerable corrective actions, run more than 900,000 criminal background checks, produced innovative prevention materials, launched a unit dedicated solely to supporting individuals and families, and trained thousands of investigators. There is no doubt New Yorkers with special needs are safer today than at any other time in State history.

Justice Center Executive Director Denise Miranda said "With the creation of the Justice Center, New York put in place the nation's broadest level of protections for vulnerable populations. The agency's dedication to this critical mission and its drive to continually improve its work and engage with stakeholders speaks for itself. I look forward to the next decade of service as we work to elevate the voices of this historically marginalized population."

Advisory Council Chairman Bill Gettman said "I have had a front row seat to the evolution of the Justice Center over the past decade. I applaud the work done by Executive Director Miranda and the agency's staff in creating a partnership with key stakeholders including the Advisory

Council and I look forward to continuing our critical work in keeping vulnerable people safe from harm.”

In conjunction with the anniversary, the Justice Center is releasing an anniversary report detailing its work over the past decade. It has also launched a website featuring interviews with stakeholders involved with the agency since launch.

A decade ago, the State made a promise to a million vulnerable New Yorkers: to maintain the nation’s highest standards of health, safety, and dignity for individuals with special needs. It was a goal unlike any other across the country. Today, we celebrate the Justice Center’s achievements, and look forward to continuing its relentless pursuit to fulfill its mission.

###

The Justice Center operates a toll-free hotline for people to report allegations of abuse, neglect, and significant incidents 24 hours a day, seven days a week. Anyone who witnesses or suspects an act of abuse or neglect has been committed can make a report. Because the Justice Center is not a first responder, callers are directed to call 9-1-1 if there is an emergency that requires an immediate medical or police response.

The Justice Center has authority to investigate all reports of abuse and neglect in covered facilities and programs, pursue administrative sanctions against staff found responsible for misconduct, and its Special Prosecutor/Inspector General works with local District Attorneys to prosecute criminal offenses involving allegations of abuse or neglect. The Justice Center notifies local district attorneys of all cases of abuse and neglect that occur in their jurisdiction.

Justice Center advocates provide guidance and information to victims, their families, personal representatives, and guardians about the reporting and investigation process, offer support during criminal court proceedings, and are available to accompany victims during interviews and court appearances.