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Children's Village Child Care Worker Accused of Strangling Teen

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

Dobbs Ferry, NY-- NYS Justice Center for the Protection of People with Special Needs Special Prosecutor Patricia E. Gunning announced today that Leon Thomas (DOB: 06/25/75), who was employed by The Children's Village as a child care worker was arrested for allegedly strangling and assaulting a 13-year-old boy in his care. The arrest was the result of an investigation conducted by the Justice Center, with assistance from the Dobbs Ferry Police Department. The facility is licensed by the NYS Office of Children and Family Services (OCFS).

The incident first came to the attention of law enforcement officials when it was reported to the Dobbs Ferry Police Department and the Justice Center's Vulnerable Persons Central Register (VPCR) Hotline.

Thomas, who was suspended from his position, was arrested on a Misdemeanor Information charging him with:

- One count of Endangering the Welfare of a Child, a class "A" Misdemeanor;
- One count of Attempted Endangering the Welfare of a Child, a class "B" Misdemeanor;
- Two counts of Assault in the third degree, a class "A" Misdemeanor;
- One count of Attempted Assault in the third, degree, a class "B" Misdemeanor;
- Criminal Obstruction of Breathing or Blood Circulation, a class "A" Misdemeanor;
- Menacing in the third degree, a class "B" Misdemeanor; and
- Harassment in the second degree, a Violation.

According to the information, Thomas allegedly grabbed the victim, placed his hands around his throat, applied pressure and then pushed and shoved the boy who fell to the ground. The victim suffered pain and required medical treatment, which included stitches for a chin laceration and a dental splint for a loose tooth.

The defendant was arraigned on the charges in Dobbs Ferry Justice Court and was released on his own recognizance. The case is being prosecuted by Justice Center Assistant Special Prosecutors Christina Calabrese and Renee Behrens.

-Continued on page 2-

Page 2 –Children’s Village Child Care Worker Accused of Strangling Teen

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 Office of Children and Family Services 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 for People With Developmental Disabilities (OPWDD), the Department 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.

Leon Thomas (DOB: 06/25/75)

