

# BUCKS COUNTY Courier Times

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## Woods Services named in lawsuits alleging abuse, neglect

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Posted Apr 17, 2019 at 7:55 PM

Updated Apr 17, 2019 at 7:55 PM

A Philadelphia lawyer contends that Woods Services, of Langhorne, did not protect his clients from harm at the hands of employees. The agency, which serves severely disabled adults and children, counters that lawsuits are “baseless” and the incidents were fully investigated and dealt with appropriately.

The families of two teens have filed separate lawsuits against a Bucks County organization that serves severely disabled adults and children, alleging the teens were assaulted while in the agency’s care.

The two lawsuits, both filed by Philadelphia attorney Michael Shaffer, allege neglect and abuse at the campus of Woods Services, a nonprofit organization that serves individuals from across the United States with difficult mental, physical, behavioral and development disorders, providing case management, residential and vocational programs. Woods’ campus straddles Langhorne and Middletown.

The latest lawsuit, filed Monday, alleges that Woods Services “has a culture of abuse and neglect that goes unreported and unaddressed,” and accuses the organization of promoting a “culture and environment” that “discourages reporting abuses by its employees.”

Shaffer contends that the New York teen, identified as “P.L.,” and in the care of Woods Services in 2017, was injured after an employee allegedly “stomped” on her back and right arm and hit her with a shoe for “acting out,” according to the suit. Afterward, the employee allegedly “conspired to cover up the incident,” the

suit alleges. The girl is no longer at Woods Services, according to the organization's spokeswoman.

"P.L." has a seizure disorder, obsessive compulsive behavior, autism, does not speak and has "severe" cognitive abilities, according to the suit, which alleges that since the attack the teen has been diagnosed with post-traumatic stress disorder and is afraid of mental health workers.

Last month, Shaffer sued Woods Services on behalf of another New York resident, Nicholas Diaz, 20, alleging that he was improperly restrained last year after he acted out when denied a snack, according to court documents.

The suit alleges an employee improperly restrained Diaz and struck him in the face, leaving him with a black eye and other face, neck and arm injuries. The suit also alleges that in October 2017 a Woods employee improperly restrained Diaz during a "behavior episode" and his face was pushed into the ground causing "various serious and significant physical injuries," according to the suit.

Diaz, who also is no longer at Woods Services, has autism and seizure disorders and is non-verbal, and experienced PTSD as a result of the incidents and has developed "serious trust issues" and fears mental health workers.

In a written statement Wednesday, Woods Services spokeswoman Cheryl Kauffman called the two lawsuits old cases that were "immediately reported and fully investigated by authorities, funders and the state agencies that oversee Woods Services."

She added that the agency took "immediate corrective action," including terminating the employees. The release did not mention if criminal charges were filed against either employee.

Kauffman called photos of the teens submitted with the lawsuit "grossly misleading."

"There is zero tolerance here for anything but compassionate care. Both funders and state agencies found that our swift response was executed correctly and appropriately and that our ongoing care is based on a closely supervised, comprehensive protocol of responsibility, accountability, and individualized plans for care," Kauffman wrote.

