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Boy sexually assaulted in his bedroom at Woods Services, lawsuit alleges

by Erin McCarthy, Updated: August 14, 2019



WOODS SERVICES



A boy with autism was sexually assaulted in his bedroom last month by a fellow resident of a Langhorne facility for the intellectually disabled, his attorneys said, and the attack was captured on a video camera monitored by his parents.

The couple, who live in Long Island, N.Y., had installed a camera in their teenage son's room to monitor his care when he moved into Woods Services in March.

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On the night of July 14, the attorneys said, the boy's mother played back the video recording of her son's daily activities, as she did every day, to make sure he was OK. Horrified, she watched a fellow resident, a larger teenage boy, enter her son's room, the attorneys said, and assault him for more than three minutes before an aide walked in and intervened.

The mother called Woods in a panic, upset that she hadn't been notified of what happened hours earlier and insistent that someone take her son to the hospital, said Michael D. Shaffer, a lawyer for the boy and his family. No one did so until the following day, he added.

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"She is aghast, in shock, can't believe it," Shaffer said. "No one had contacted her. No one had told her what happened."

The allegations came to light Monday in a lawsuit against Woods Services, a Bucks County nonprofit that serves more than 4,000 people with intellectual and developmental disabilities, brain trauma, and other behavioral conditions.

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Cheryl Kauffman, Woods' spokesperson, said in a statement that the lawsuit contains "sensational and outrageous allegations."

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"The video described in the press release as showing a sexual assault on Shaffer's clients' son shows nothing of the sort. The assertion that Woods did nothing in response is similarly false," she said. "The boy who came into their son's room was there for approximately 3 minutes before being discovered and escorted out by Woods' staff. Woods' staff made sure plaintiffs' son was safe. There was no cause for an immediate trip to the E.R. because there was no evidence that a sexual assault took place or that the young man was in any way injured."

The statement also noted that the victim remains a resident at Woods, "where he continues to be very well taken care of, a full month after this alleged sexual assault took place." Shaffer said administrative and funding hurdles have prevented the parents from immediately placing their son in another facility.

Woods often helps people with severe disabilities, and many have praised the care their loved ones received there, especially in light of negative publicity.

"Families in desperate need of placement for a loved one will not find anything that comes close to what Woods has to offer. It is the BEST!" wrote the parents of a longtime Woods resident in [an April online testimonial](#).

But in recent years, four other allegations of abuse and neglect at Woods have resulted in lawsuits and [outside probes](#). Past complaints have alleged that residents of the facility were [beaten by caretakers](#) and, in one case, [sexually assaulted by other residents at a supervised dance](#). In most cases, Woods has denied the allegations.

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This week's lawsuit, filed in federal court in Philadelphia, contends that Woods was negligent in caring for the boy, who is severely autistic and nonverbal, and requires constant care during the day and 10-minute bed checks at night.

After the alleged assault, Woods Services employees didn't take the boy to the hospital until the next day, the lawsuit says, and not until after a shower, which could wash off DNA evidence.

For two weeks, the camera in the boy's room was temporarily disabled, despite the fact that the boys' parents had gotten permission from the facility to install and monitor it, the suit alleges. Woods, meanwhile, said it had been ordered by the state Department of Human Services to temporarily turn off in-room cameras.

Not being able to monitor their son for those weeks further traumatized the parents, Shaffer said.



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