



Teen's Sexual Assault Ignored At Pennsylvania Residential Care Facility, Lawsuit Says

A lawsuit alleges the teen was taken to the hospital nearly 24 hours after his alleged attack and only after his parent's insisted

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A Bucks County facility for people with developmental and intellectual disabilities is under fire for an alleged sexual assault involving two of its residents.

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A Bucks County, Pennsylvania, residential care facility failed to protect a 15-year-old boy with severe autism against being sexually assaulted by another developmentally disabled resident, according to a lawsuit filed Monday in federal court.

The lawsuit, filed by Philadelphia-based lawyer Michael D. Shaffer, alleged that the victim was taken to a hospital nearly 24 hours after his attack at Woods Services in Langhorne, Pennsylvania, and only at the request of his parents, who live in Long Island, New York.

The lawsuit accused Woods of failing to report the assault to police, provide adequate medical attention and alert the teen's parents of his alleged attack.

Woods, which houses some 400 children and adults with intellectual and developmental disabilities, denied the allegations.

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“We have seen no evidence to date that there was any sexual contact between the young men,” an emailed statement read in part. “The staff followed strict procedures in promptly informing the authorities (including the police) of the incident in question and taking the young man to the hospital to be examined.”

A spokesperson said the facility is conducting an internal investigation. Middletown Township police are also conducting an investigation, according to officials. Both investigations remain open.

The July 14 incident was captured on a surveillance camera purchased by the victim's parents. The surveillance video was reviewed by NBC10.

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Every night before bed, the alleged victim's mother would check video from that day to see how her son was doing. On this particular night, she stumbled on a horrifying scene, the family's lawyer said.

Video showed an attendant putting the victim, identified only as A.C. in court records, to sleep after receiving his nightly dose of the sedative Risperidone. A.C. was naked from the waist down and the staffer threw a blanket over him before leaving the room.

A few minutes later, another young resident entered A.C.'s room and took off his own clothes. For about three minutes, he assaulted A.C., the lawsuit alleged.

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A staffer interrupted the assault and shooed the other resident away. He pulled the blanket over A.C. and left, according to video footage.

A.C.'s mother watched the incident from home, about an hour-and-a-half after it happened, according to her lawyer. Horrified, she called Woods and demanded that her son be taken to a hospital.

A.C. didn't see a doctor until the following day after he had already showered, Shaffer told NBC10 in an interview Tuesday. An emergency room attendant allegedly told A.C.'s mother to call police.

Neither Woods nor the alleged victim's family have seen the hospital report.

"The mom is devastated and terrified that her son ... can't communicate," Shaffer said. "She just wants him to be safe."

Based on its more than 100-year history, the victim's parents thought Woods was well-equipped to help their son, according to Shaffer.

They chose Woods after their son's condition worsened when he turned 14 years old, he said. A.C. was described by both Shaffer and a Woods spokesperson as being non-verbal and requiring 24-hour supervision.

"Putting your child in care of others is probably the most heart-wrenching decision you can make. They did the best they could," Shaffer said. "They put their trust in this facility and it is clear they did not meet that trust."

Woods spokeswoman Cheryl M. Kauffman refuted any claims that the facility failed to respond appropriately when staffers became aware of the incident.

In a statement, Kauffman said residents living at Woods have "significant cognitive deficits thereby limiting how much they understand about their sexuality and behavioral boundaries."

"Although we provide training to our staff in dealing with such concerns, we feel providers must do more to help individuals comprehend what they are experiencing," she said in a statement.

"We continue to work with medical and other experts in developing teaching and counseling programs that will help those with significant disabilities better manage and understand their behaviors."

The allegations against Woods are just the latest in a series of alleged abuse or neglect at similar facilities throughout the region. Last month, Pennsylvania Gov. Tom Wolf [ordered the state to overhaul its oversight](#) of residential care institutions after an Inquirer investigation revealed [decades of abuse at Glen Mills reform school](#).

Wolf's executive order created a new child advocate position within a newly formed Office of Advocacy and Reform meant to increase accountability for child-serving institutions.

These reforms come too late, however, for previous victims of abuse. Shaffer also cited decades of abuse at Woods, including one incident where a staffer hit a young resident with a bowling pin.

In a separate incident at Woods, employees allegedly shoved a resident's face to the ground and forcefully restrained him, causing "serious and significant injuries" to the victim, according to court documents.

Shaffer's firm also represented those and other clients with grievances against Woods. The cases remain open, he said.

Woods is aware of the additional lawsuits, according to Kauffamn. She said the allegations are baseless and the filings tantamount to "defamation."

"Lawsuits and the threat of litigation cannot and will not deter Woods from its core mission of serving and supporting individuals with complex disabilities to achieve their highest potential and live fulfilling lives," Kauffman said in a statement.

Find this article at:

<https://www.nbcphiladelphia.com/news/local/Lawsuit-Woods-Services-Bucks-County-Negligence-Sexual-Assault-540367471.html>

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