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April 29, 2014

Laurie A. Kelley
Acting Commissioner
New York State Office for People With Developmental Disabilities
44 Holland Avenue
Albany, New York 12229

RE: NYS IG 0030-031-2013

Dear Acting Commissioner Kelley:

In January 2013, the Inspector General's Office received allegations of abuse and other inappropriate conduct by staff at Camp Wilton, an overnight camp for developmentally disabled adults that is owned and operated by the Office for People With Developmental Disabilities (OPWDD) in Saratoga County. The allegation of abuse was investigated by OPWDD and not substantiated. My office investigated the remaining complaints that alleged misconduct by camp counselors.

At the outset, I want to emphasize that over the course of multiple visits during the summer of 2013, my investigators observed that Camp Wilton provides a positive program for developmentally disabled campers in a beautiful setting. Counselors were caring and attentive to the campers' needs while allowing them to enjoy the benefits of an overnight camp program. However, we did identify a number of administrative issues relating to the hiring, training, and supervision of the counselors, thus enhancing the positive experience for campers and maximizing the communication between the camp's seasonal staff and OPWDD full-time staff.

We found that for five years, the hiring of camp counselors was conducted solely at the discretion of [REDACTED]. Those hired were [REDACTED]'s friends or their friends, resulting in an insular group of counselors of whom [REDACTED] was overly protective. It is our understanding that prior [REDACTED] also exercised unfettered discretion in hiring counselors. Successive personnel directors at the O.D. Heck Developmental Center, under whose administrative purview the camp operates, displayed an utter lack of interest in the hiring process of these seasonal employees and never ensured that job descriptions were prepared or

minimum qualifications were established. No experience in direct care of developmentally disabled individuals was required of staff responsible for this very population temporarily residing in a rural overnight facility. The only bar to being hired as a counselor was a criminal record.

With regard to training and orientation, we found that Camp Wilton's rules and regulations were not reviewed or approved by O.D. Heck staff. Even a cursory reading of the rules provided to the counselors should have prompted a review of conduct at the camp. Rule 27, for example, told counselors the conditions under which they could engage in sexual relations at the camp, which is state property. In fact, the camp's [REDACTED] was notoriously engaged in a sexual relationship with a counselor in the director's cabin, and my investigators were told by the director that counselors were permitted to have sexual relations with other counselors in a particular cabin in which no developmentally disabled individuals were housed, but to which they had access. Counselors were not provided with OPWDD's employee handbook, which contradicts a number of the camp's rules, nor were returning counselors required to attend all training sessions provided by OPWDD permanent staff and the camp director.

While OPWDD staff members were required to visit the camp once a week, the visits occurred only during normal business hours, despite the camp's 24-hour operation. Visits did not always result in written observations or findings. The only other scheduled communication between the camp and O.D. Heck was the director's weekly report in which he communicated camp events and any concerns.

These problems may have contributed to the circumstances surrounding a photograph provided as part of the complaint we received. As you may be aware, the photograph, taken in the summer of 2012 on camp property, shows six female counselors in suggestive poses wearing adult diapers misappropriated from Camp Wilton supplies. The photograph is most troubling in that it depicts counselors who may not have viewed Camp Wilton, first and foremost, as a workplace nor sufficiently appreciated their role in providing care for a vulnerable population.

Significantly, when [REDACTED] learned of the existence of the photograph in the fall of 2012, he requested that one of the depicted counselors remove the picture from the Internet, but did not advise anyone at OPWDD of the matter. Moreover, [REDACTED] rehired the counselors who posed for the photograph (and, in fact, promoted one), with the exception of two counselors who were charged with serious driving violations after the camp season and disqualified from employment as a result.

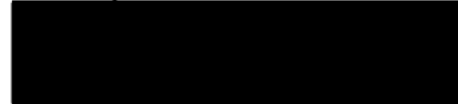
Based on the foregoing, I recommend that OPWDD adopt job descriptions for camp counselors at all levels. With the use of that job description and enunciated minimum qualifications, counselor openings should be posted on the StateJobsNY website and submitted to placement offices at college campuses throughout the state. Counselors should be at least 18 years old. Training for counselors should include the OPWDD employee handbook, a revised camp code of conduct, and the role of the New York State Justice Center for the Protection of People with Special Needs. Attendance at training for all counselors should be mandated and documented. O.D. Heck supervisory staff should engage in multiple weekly inspections of the

camps, with some visits unannounced and outside normal business hours, and a report of each inspection should be retained by OPWDD for five years.

Within 30 days, please advise me of any actions or decisions taken in response to the above recommendation. Your response should include copies of any new or amended policies or procedures.

If you have any questions about our investigation, you may contact me at (518) 474-1010.

Sincerely,



Catherine Leahy Scott
Inspector General