



HPAE

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Violent Incidents at Sunrise House Spark Workers to Raise Concerns for Patient and Worker Safety

After several incidents of violence at Sunrise House, HPAE, the union representing 125 addiction treatment workers at the facility, filed a complaint with the Office of Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA), the federal agency charged with the enforcement of safety and health in workplaces.

On December 12th a letter was sent to the regional office of OSHA describing several incidents of assaults on workers while caring for patients, urging the agency to conduct an investigation into the lack of worker and patient safety in order to prevent any future incidents of violence.

“As frontline caregivers struggling to curb the rising tide of addiction in our country, we need the security that our treatment facility is following violence prevention guidelines so we can provide the safest care,” said Sheila Tubridy Schicker, who works at Sunrise House and is a member of HPAE Local 5629.

Sunrise House, an addiction center affiliated with the national for-profit chain American Addiction Centers, was inspected earlier this year by NJ Department of Human Services. AAC was cited for thirteen deficiencies at Sunrise House including a failure to maintain staffing levels of licensed or certified counseling staff, lack of required staff training and lack of direct clinical supervision.

“Workers deserve to have the opportunity to improve the conditions they work under as they increase the possibility for a better life for their patients,” said Ann Twomey, HPAE President. “Unsafe working conditions prompted workers to form their union. When the employer fails to respond to repeated calls for improvements, workers must call on state and federal regulators to enforce violence prevention standards to protect themselves and their patients.”

Shortly after the workers voted to form their own union in June 2016 they elected a bargaining committee that continues to negotiate with AAC administrators for a first contract. The contract will improve working conditions for all non-managerial staff, including nurses, counselors, technicians and service staff at the treatment center in Lafayette.

Sunrise House was founded in 1983 as a non-profit substance abuse treatment center. AAC purchased the 110 bed substance abuse treatment center in 2015 for a total purchase price of \$6.6 million.

Health Professionals and Allied Employees, AFT, AFL-CIO is the largest healthcare union in New Jersey representing 13,000 nurses, social workers, therapists, technicians, medical researchers, and other health care professionals in hospitals, nursing homes, home care agencies, blood banks, and university research facilities.