

Defense attorney in Whiting patient-abuse case accuses state of witness tampering

By JOSH KOVNER

The lawyer for the only defendant in the patient-abuse case at Whiting Forensic Hospital to hold out for trial has accused the state of witness tampering, citing the suspension of two Whiting workers who had spoken in support of another defendant at his sentencing hearing earlier this year.

In a motion filed Wednesday in Superior Court in Middletown, attorney Norman Pattis said the suspensions of forensic nurse Sarah Lukman and treatment worker Lori Hubbard amount to intimidation. He said the actions would cast a chilling pall on all of the current employees he intends to call to either attest to the good nature of his client, former forensic nurse Mark Cusson, or to provide some narration to the soundless video that is the basis for multiple counts of cruelty lodged against Cusson.

Pattis said in his written motion that Lukman and Hubbard are former colleagues of Gregory

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Pattis said.



Attorney Norman Pattis views the suspension of two workers at Whiting Forensic Hospital as witness tampering.

Giantonio, who, along with Cusson and eight other former employees of the maximum-security Whiting, was arrested and charged with the felony cruelty counts.

Pattis wrote that the two women “offered supportive comments on Mr. Giantonio’s behalf” at his

sentencing on Jan. 15.

“Immediately thereafter, Ms. Lukman and Ms. Hubbard were placed on administrative leave and told they were under investigation by the state Department of Mental Health and Addiction Services,” the motion states.

Lukman was hired in 2005. Hubbard, a forensic treatment specialist, has worked at Whiting, on the campus of the Connecticut Valley Hospital in Middletown, since 2013.

Lukman was told by DMHAS officials at her labor hearing Tuesday that “her characterization” of the alleged victim, William Shehadi as “difficult, violent, and aggressive was the gravamen of the state’s complaint against her,” Pattis wrote.

The Courant on Wednesday obtained letters, each dated Feb. 1, informing Lukman and Hubbard they were being placed on leave. They are accused of a violating a rule against disclosing any information about a patient without authorization. The letters are signed by Steve Beaupre, director of labor relations for the mental health agency.

Cusson’s trial is set to start in about two weeks. Jury selection began Wednesday. Superior Court Judge Jose A. Suarez has not yet ruled on Pattis’ motion and the prosecution has not yet

filed a response.

Pattis is requesting the case against Cusson be dismissed or, short of that, be delayed for at least a year so that “corrective action” can be taken against what he described as intimidating measures.

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The prosecutor, Supervisory Assistant State’s Attorney Jeffrey Doskos, asked prospective jurors during the selection process Wednesday whether they would have the patience and powers of concentration to watch a lengthy video tape that could be dark or hard to see.

Cusson was observed on video kicking Shehadi repeatedly, dousing him with an unspecified liquid, straddling him in bed and placing his groin and then his butt on the patient’s face, the warrant for his arrest states. Most of the time, Shehadi was in bed when the early morning abuse began, according to the arrest warrant.

Shehadi was acquitted by reason of insanity in the 1995 homicide

of his father. He was given a 10-year commitment and arrived at Whiting in November 1995. The commitment expired on Oct. 31, 2005, but has been extended, in one- and two-year increments, ever since because of Shehadi’s profound psychiatric illnesses, according to state records. ■