

*NEWS RELEASE*

*For Immediate Release*

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*Contact:*

*Mazie Stilwell, Communications Specialist*

*(515) 246-2637*

*mstilwell@afscmeiowa.org*

**NURSE BRUTALLY ASSAULTED AT INDEPENDENCE MHI FIRED FOR NOT HEALING QUICKLY ENOUGH**

DES MOINES – On October 24, 2018, Tina Suckow, an LPN (Licensed Practical Nurse) at the Independence Mental Health Institute (MHI), was [brutally assaulted by a violent patient](https://www.afscmecouncil61.org/news/release-assault-independence-mhi-lands-lpn-hospital-staff-fear-further) in an attack that required the intervention of twelve people to regain control. Now, the State of Iowa has terminated Tina after denying her request for catastrophic leave. All of her FMLA and accrued medical leave has been used.

Rather than being treated like the victim that she is, the management of the Independence MHI has treated the career nurse more like a suspect, making her jump through administrative hoops and insisting that she must return to her full scope of duties, despite not being cleared by her medical team. She continues to cope with neurological damage and lasting physical impairments. These issues have been complicating Tina’s road to recovery ever since the day of the assault when she was interrogated by her supervisor, Deb Fenner, for being taken to the emergency room at the insistence of the doctor she initially saw. Fenner’s constant phone calls became so intrusive that the ER doctor took Tina’s phone and ordered Fenner to stop calling so that she could be treated for her injuries and admitted to the hospital.

Once released from the hospital, Tina was required by Georgeanne Cassidy Westcott, the MHI’s nursing director, to be driven two hours roundtrip to hand deliver a doctor’s note documenting the extent of her head, knee, and shoulder injuries.

After Tina attended physical therapy three times per week in an attempt to repair her knee and shoulder injuries, workers compensation eventually agreed to cover surgery for both. The knee surgery was performed on February 7, 2019 and the shoulder surgery on February 26, 2019. Tina’s neurologist required a 6.5-hour test to assess her readiness to perform her full duties. This was completed on March 12, 2019, but Georgeanne Cassidy Westcott determined that was too late and that Tina would be fired (removed from payroll) on March 15, 2019. Georgeanne also questioned the legitimacy of Tina’s knee surgery for a bent meniscus, saying that she had never heard of such a procedure, and became irate with Tina for not contacting her immediately following the procedure to report on its outcome and complete additional paperwork.

After making every attempt to return to work as quickly as possible, Tina was shocked to learn that she would be terminated for failing to recover quickly enough from two major surgeries and confirmed memory impairment. She requested catastrophic leave from the Department of Administrative Services to bridge the gap in her recovery time, but Carol Adams of DAS denied this request and informed her that the leave was intended for “people with cancer.”

“After four and a half years of dedicated service to the patients of the Independence Mental Health Institute and to the State of Iowa, management like Deb Fenner, Georgeanne Cassidy Westcott, and Carol Adams treated Tina Suckow like she did something wrong,” **said AFSCME Council 61 President Danny Homan**. “She was viciously attacked while performing her job duties and was shown appreciation by getting fired. Not only does this nurse deserve a paycheck, she deserves an apology, too.”

*The American Federation of State, County, and Municipal Employees Council 61 represents 40,000 public employees in Iowa including law enforcement and correctional officers, firefighters, mental health workers, professional school staff, emergency responders, and many other workers. AFSCME Council 61 also represents home health care and child care providers across the state and private sector workers at Prairie Meadows, Palmer College of Chiropractic, Des Moines University, and ABM (Marshalltown).*

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