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## **New Lawsuit Details Horrific Physical and Sexual Abuse at Palmetto Pee Dee Behavioral Health**

**August 6, 2025**

FLORENCE, SC - Attorneys have filed a new lawsuit against Palmetto Pee Dee Behavioral Health and its parent companies, Universal Health Services, Inc and UHS of Delaware, Inc, detailing the nightmare of physical and sexual abuse one 15-year-old Darlington boy identified as "John Doe" endured while he was a resident of Palmetto Pee Dee Behavioral Health in 2014.

John Doe is represented by renowned civil rights attorney [Bakari Sellers](#), [Mario Pacella](#), [Amy Willbanks](#) and [Alexandra Benevento](#) of [Strom Law Firm](#).

According to the lawsuit, John Doe entered Palmetto Pee Dee Behavioral Health in January 2014 to undergo treatment for trauma and the abuse began almost immediately when he woke up to find his assigned roommate licking his feet and masturbating. Though the teenager reported the incident immediately, the facility's staff, who housed survivors together with residents who had inflicted trauma on others, offered only a verbal warning to the roommate and refused to move the teenage John Doe.

From there the abuse only escalated as the 15-year-old endured abuse from at least six different residents ranging from unwanted advances and touching to violent beating and forced oral sex. Though John Doe reported the abuse to the Palmetto Pee Dee Behavioral Health staff, no action was ever taken and the abusers would beat the teenager for reporting the abuse.

In one incident where John Doe was beaten and stomped by two different abusers, the facility's staff simply watched the beating while doing nothing to intervene. In fact, one of the staff actually recorded the attack on her phone. Despite having severe injuries, John Doe never taken to the hospital or received medical treatment for the beating beyond a Tylenol.

The lawsuit goes on to detail how one staff member, Harry Austin, would actually beat John Doe himself and other staff members would ply the teenage residents with alcohol and force them to have sex.

According to the lawsuit, these kinds of allegations are not new at United Health Service (UHS) facilities and that sexual abuse at UHS facilities across the country has ranged from inappropriate strip searches to violent, forceful rape.

A [November 2022 investigation](#) at a UHS facility in South Carolina revealed that one 13-year-old with a confirmed history of child sex abuse sexually assaulted a 10-year-old on two consecutive days at the facility and, in April 2019, a 12-year-old boy was found wandering the streets of Florence hungry, frightened, and shoeless after escaping Palmetto Pee Dee Behavioral Health. The boy reported that, like John Doe, he was being abused, bullied and beat up at the facility, further claiming that the facility.

"It's horrific," said Sellers. "We would be disgusted to see adults enduring this kind of abuse at a prison, but to see it visited upon children at a medical facility where they should be safe and cared for is something else entirely."

"Companies like Universal Health Services know this is happening and know how to stop it. They don't because taking action threatens their profit margin."

"This young survivor is not alone. There are countless others like him suffering in the shadows because of what has happened to them," said Benevento. "They didn't deserve this abuse and we encourage them to come forward so we can stand with them."

The attorneys confirm that they represent dozens of clients like John Doe across the state and plan to file lawsuits against multiple facilities like Palmetto Pee Dee Behavioral Health in the coming weeks.

Click [HERE](#) for a copy of the filed lawsuit.

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