

*NEWS RELEASE*

*For Immediate Release*

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*Contact:*

*Mazie Stilwell, Communications Specialist*

*(515) 246-2637*

[*mstilwell@afscmeiowa.org*](mailto:mstilwell@afscmeiowa.org)

**FOUR STAFF ASSAULTS IN NINE DAYS AT INDEPENDENCE MHI**

DES MOINES – AFSCME Council 61 President Danny Homan issued the following statement regarding four assaults on staff members at the Independence Mental Health Institute over the span of nine days:

“There is a safety crisis taking place for the employees of the Independence MHI, and the State of Iowa is showing no urgency to address it. While we are still gathering details of each incident and how it could’ve been prevented, here is what we know:

* On Thursday, June 6, a Residential Treatment Worker (RTW) was hit in the head and jaw at least three times by a patient who escaped restraints. The RTW is off on workers’ compensation and is being treated for a closed head injury, cervical sprain, and TMJ pain.
* The same day, an RN was punched in the nose and scratched repeatedly by a patient. Following this attack, the RN gave two weeks’ notice of her resignation. She was then moved to the sex offender unit with one other RTW. The RTW was then assaulted by a patient shortly after the RN arrived on the unit. The RTW continued to work, despite being assaulted, and later responded to a Code Green on another unit. This left the RN to work the sex offender unit by herself – something that management promised would never happen, given prior sexual assaults of employees on that unit. Fed up with poor training, mandatory overtime, and low morale, she resigned immediately following that fearful shift.
* On Friday, June 14, another RTW was assaulted by a patient, including having their head slammed into a wall, followed by, as they described it, ‘windmill punches everywhere.’

“These frequent assaults point to the incompetence of the management running the facility and their carelessness when putting frontline workers in avoidable danger. Open positions are left unfilled, training is ineffective and incomplete, and managers pick and choose who they like best when granting vacation time off and benefits like catastrophic leave.

“When Governor Reynolds talks about taking DHS in [‘a new direction’](https://www.thegazette.com/subject/news/health/iowa-governor-kim-reynolds-plans-to-take-department-of-human-services-in-a-new-direction-20190618) after asking Director Foxhoven to resign, we sure hope that includes safety measures for the dedicated public service workers who are put in harm’s way every single day. Her office says that these ‘changes will be announced in the coming days and weeks ahead,’ but the truth of the matter is, worker safety cannot wait another day.”

*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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