



## Jonathan Rosenfeld's Nursing Homes Abuse Blog

# Never Discount The Real Impact Of Sexual Abuse On The Disabled

By **Jonathan Rosenfeld** on September 02, 2011

Concerned about their daughter's health, the family of Violet Townsend immediately sought medical care for the 29-year-old woman when they noticed blood on the seat of her wheelchair while visiting her at [Grande Oaks Nursing Home](#) (Ohio). After receiving care at a nearby hospital, it was determined that Ms. Townsend's injury was consistent with a sexual assault and tested positive for a STD.

What makes Ms. Townsend's situation unique and her situation especially troubling is that a brain injury she sustained in 2006 has left her immobile and unable to communicate.

An investigation into the incident by both officials at Grande Oaks and with the Ohio Department of Health provided no insight as to how or why the incident may have occurred.

But, how can this be?

Tragically, physically and mentally impaired nursing home patients can be targets of abuse at the hands of other patients, residents or even visitors. The biggest hurdle

associated with the investigation and prosecution of these cases is typically the individuals inability to communicate the specifics regarding the incident or perpetrator.

Given this rather large hurdle, it is even more important for a timely investigation to be conducted so physical evidence can be examined and any relevant witnesses can be interviewed.

As a **nursing home lawyer**, I frequently find **sexual abuse cases involving the disabled** to be incredibly frustrating to present from the perspective of damages. Too frequently, there is a perception that because a person cannot articulate the incident or how they have been impacted, there is an assumption that they have not been truly impacted.

Given these prejudices, many of these cases rely heavily on the testimony of family and experts to help relay the true impact on the person.

In the case of Violet Townsend, it seems as though those whom know her best can already tell a difference in behavior following this suspected incident. According to her father, Michael Townsend, "She got to the point where you couldn't even touch her and she would just shake. I couldn't touch her. Nobody could touch her."