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Male nurse's aide could lose certification in fondling case

By Sue Epstein
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A certified nurse's aide accused of fondling an elderly patient at an Edison nursing home faces the loss of his state certification at a hearing next month.

Sat Van Pham, 59, was arrested Wednesday while working at the Roosevelt Care Center where authorities say he fondled a 72-year-old wheelchair-bound woman on Christmas Day while she awaited a visit from her family.

Van Pham's attorney, [Vincent J. Sanzone](#), said his client is innocent and was "quite upset" that he was still in jail yesterday.

A judge set bail at \$25,000 cash for the Woodbridge resident.

[Sanzone](#) said his client was an officer — either a lieutenant colonel or a major — in the South Vietnamese Marines until the fall of Saigon in 1975.

"He was arrested by the North Vietnamese as an American sympathizer and sent to a re-education camp — actually a concentration camp — where he was tortured," the attorney said. "He's afraid of police and law enforcement, in light of his past."

After Van Pham was released in 1985, he was reunited with his family in the United States. He and his wife have five children.

A family member, who answered the telephone at their Dow Avenue home but refused to give his name, said Van Pham is "pretty fine" and is "holding up."

In July 1992, Van Pham took the required 90-hour training program to become a nurse's aide and received his certification, according to Dennis McGowan, a spokesman for the Department of Health. He was recertified in July 1996 and due to be recertified in July.

McGowan said the program consists of 50 hours of class and 40 hours of field work, followed by a two-part examination.

He said the complaint against Van Pham was reported to the state shortly after the woman complained to the administration at the facility, formerly operated by Middlesex County and now by Solomon Health Group of Denver.

McGowan said the complaint was investigated by the Office of the Ombudsman for the Elderly, and "the allegations were substantiated."

He said Van Pham was notified in March that he was going to have his certification lifted. The notice gave Van Pham 30 days to request a hearing, which he did.

[Sanzone](#) said the hearing is scheduled for June 10 at 10 a.m.

The case was also referred to the Middlesex County Police Department. Detective William Van Dorn said he received the case in March and filed the charge of aggravated criminal sexual contact, a third-degree offense, against Van Pham earlier this week.

McGowan said Van Pham's name was added to the national register of nurse's aides who have been convicted – though Van Pham has not been convicted – of physical, sexual, financial or any other kind of abuse of their patients.

"There are 133 persons from New Jersey who are on the list now," he said. "There is a notation next to Van Pham's name that his status is under review. That means they should call us for more information."

McGowan said there are 33,000 certified nurse's aides in New Jersey and 8,500 are added a year.