

Stakeholder Group Lauds Agreement to Serve North Carolinians with Mental Illnesses in the Community Instead of Adult Care Homes

RALEIGH, NC – August 24, 2012 – A diverse group of North Carolina stakeholders applauded the U.S. Department of Justice (DOJ) and the state of North Carolina for reaching an agreement yesterday to end the state's reliance on large, segregated adult care homes for people with mental illnesses.

Some of the requirements of the [agreement*](#) include:

- The state must develop 3,000 new units of supported housing over 7 years for people with serious mental illnesses living in large adult care homes with significant numbers of residents with mental illnesses, coming out of state hospitals, or diverted from admission to adult care homes.
- The housing units must be permanent, afford tenancy rights, and enable people with disabilities to interact with people without disabilities to the fullest extent possible and must not limit access to the community.
- Virtually all of these housing units must be scattered throughout the community.
- The state must provide the array and intensity of services and supports necessary for these individuals to live in integrated settings.

"People with disabilities deserve to live in their own homes on their own terms just like people without disabilities. North Carolina has rightly embraced the civil rights of people with mental illnesses," said Jennifer Mathis, deputy legal director of the Judge David L. Bazelon Center for Mental Health Law, which represents the stakeholder group. "This is a very important step that will put North Carolina on the path toward a system that offers real opportunities to people with mental illnesses."

"With this agreement, thousands of individuals with mental illnesses will be able to obtain the services they need to succeed in their own homes and resources will go to programs that work," said Connie L. Cochran, president and CEO of Easter Seals UCP North Carolina and Virginia.

"Our state leaders have answered our call to give citizens with mental illnesses the opportunity to be full participants in their communities and live the same kind of lives as people without disabilities live," said Deby Dihoff, executive director of National Alliance on Mental Illness (NAMI) North Carolina.

Laurie Coker, director of the North Carolina Consumer Advocacy, Networking, and Support Organization, said, "It is our hope that this agreement will enable North Carolina to eliminate its

outdated policies and practices and ensure that people with mental illnesses can live in places of their own choosing.”

The agreement follows months of negotiations after an investigation by DOJ found that North Carolina is violating the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) and the U.S. Supreme Court's 1999 *Olmstead* decision, by failing to afford many people with mental illnesses the opportunity to live in integrated settings.

The stakeholder group includes some of the state's largest providers of community services for people with disabilities, as well as national and state mental health consumer and family organizations, and a former North Carolina mental health commissioner.

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The Bazelon Center for Mental Health Law (www.bazelon.org) is the leading national legal-advocacy organization representing people with mental disabilities. It promotes laws and policies that can enable people with psychiatric or developmental disabilities to exercise their life choices and access the resources they need to participate fully in their communities.

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*[Download PDFs of the complaint, the agreement and this press release here.](#)