

Bazelon Center Lauds Agreement to Serve Georgians with Mental Disabilities in the Community Instead of State Hospitals

Washington DC, October 20, 2010 – The Bazelon Center for Mental Health Law today applauded the U.S. Department of Justice and the State of Georgia for reaching yesterday's agreement in a lawsuit aimed at moving people in Georgia who have mental disabilities out of harmful state institutions and serving them instead in the community.

"While not a panacea, this agreement takes the first step to ensuring that Georgians are afforded mental health services that are fully integrated into the community, as the *Olmstead* Supreme Court decision and the American with Disabilities Act demand," said Robert Bernstein, PhD, executive director of the Bazelon Center. The Bazelon Center represents a coalition of stakeholders that has advised the federal district court in the case, known as *United States v. Georgia*.

"We applaud all parties for reaching a settlement agreement that attempts to right the wrongs that thousands of Georgians with mental illnesses have faced for decades at the hand of their own state government," said Ira Burnim, the Bazelon Center's legal director.

"This settlement agreement is the first document that has fully articulated the distinct array of mental health services needed to achieve full community integration. It also is the first document that holds the state accountable for implementing the system that Georgians with mental illnesses need and deserve," said Lewis Bossing, senior staff attorney at the Bazelon Center.

Once the agreement is endorsed by the federal court, the state must begin a staged process to offer a wide array of community mental health services to more than 9,000 Georgians with serious mental illnesses who will be moved out of state hospitals. These services include mental health crisis response teams, approximately 40 teams that will help residents transition out of hospitals into the community, a toll-free number offering resources on how to deal with a psychiatric emergency, peer-support services and a handful of around-the-clock crisis service centers.

The Bazelon Center will continue its representation of the stakeholder coalition monitoring implementation of the agreement over the next five years or longer.