

Coalition of 70 Organizations Submits Court Statement Supporting Va.-Justice Department Agreement to Strengthen Home- and Community-based Services for People with Disabilities

Richmond, Va. – April 6, 2012 – A diverse coalition of 70 Virginia stakeholders submitted a statement to the federal court in Richmond today in support of a January 2012 settlement agreement between the Commonwealth of Virginia and the U.S. Department of Justice that would afford almost 5,000 people with intellectual and other developmental disabilities the chance to receive the services they need to live successfully in their homes and communities.

Coalition members are organizations composed of and/or representing thousands of Virginians with intellectual and other developmental disabilities and their family members, as well as community service boards, service providers, and independent living centers.

Federal district court Judge John A. Gibney Jr. invited the public to submit comments on the proposed settlement agreement. Judge Gibney has indicated that he will hold a hearing during which stakeholders may express their views on whether the settlement should be approved.

Represented by the Richmond office of the law firm Williams Mullen and the Judge David L. Bazelon Center for Mental Health Law, the coalition submitted a statement urging Judge Gibney to approve the historic settlement agreement. The following is an excerpt of the statement: "People with intellectual and developmental disabilities typically thrive in their homes and communities when they receive the services they need. Without appropriate services, families often experience financial, emotional, and physical fatigue, and face unfair and cruel choices about how to care for their loved ones under difficult circumstances."

Brendan O'Toole, a lawyer for the coalition from Williams Mullen, said, "Giving people the services they need to live at home keeps families together. Our families, our schools, and our communities will all benefit from the participation of people with disabilities."

Robert Bernstein, Ph.D., president and CEO of the Bazelon Center, said, "This agreement will allow people with disabilities the freedom to make choices that the rest of us take for granted, like what and when to eat, when to get up in the morning, whom to spend time with, and what employment and hobbies to pursue. In this day and age, no one should have to forsake these basic freedoms because of disability."

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The Judge David L. 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 serious mental illnesses or intellectual disabilities to exercise their life choices and access the resources they need to participate fully in their communities.

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To speak to the Bazelon Center about the coalition, contact Dominic Holt at [dominic @ bazelon.org](mailto:dominic@bazelon.org) or 202.467.5730, ext. 311.