

Advocates Urge End to Reliance on Large, Segregated Adult Care Homes
NC in Violation of ADA; US Justice Department Threatens Suit

RALEIGH, NC – November 30, 2011 – In a letter to North Carolina Governor Beverly Perdue, a diverse group of North Carolina stakeholders today urged Perdue to end the state's reliance on large, segregated adult care homes for individuals with mental illness and to avoid a threatened lawsuit by the U.S. Department of Justice.

After a months-long investigation, the Justice Department concluded in its July 28, 2011, findings that North Carolina violates the federal Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) by needlessly segregating thousands of people with mental illness in large, institutional adult care homes. Most people with mental illness who live in these homes could successfully live in more integrated settings such as supportive housing, according to the findings. Supportive housing enables people with physical and/or mental disabilities to live in their own homes or apartments with needed services and supports.

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. The stakeholders warned that if the Justice Department sues North Carolina, the state is likely to lose.

"North Carolina is clearly capable of taking the necessary steps to afford adult care home residents with mental illness the chance to live in integrated settings," said Jennifer Mathis, deputy legal director of the Judge David L. Bazelon Center for Mental Health Law, which represents the group.

"There is ample capacity among community service providers to meet these individuals' needs," said Mathis. "In addition, resources can readily be redirected from adult care homes to support people in their own homes."

"We all want people to have the chance to lead healthy, productive lives," said Bill Rowe, general counsel with the North Carolina Justice Center. "Providing supportive housing for individuals with mental illness would get them the services they need to succeed, while making sure our resources go to programs that work."

"It is time for North Carolina to give its citizens with mental illness 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, "North Carolina must eliminate its outdated policies and practices and ensure that people with mental illnesses can live in places of their own choosing."

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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.

The North Carolina Justice Center is the state's leading progressive advocacy and research organization. The Justice Center's mission is to end poverty in North Carolina by ensuring that every

household has access to the resources, services and fair treatment it needs to achieve economic security.

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