



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

CONTACTS:

Julie Rosenthal for Bazelon Center
202-486-3059
Julie@jrcommunications.com

Norma Kelly for Bazelon Center
818-509-0575
norma@jrcommunications.com

**BAZELON CENTER FOR MENTAL HEALTH LAW PARTNERS WITH STEPTOE
TO ADVOCATE AND PROVIDE LEGAL COUNSEL FOR COLLEGE STUDENTS
EXPERIENCING CAMPUS MENTAL HEALTH DISCRIMINATION**

Washington, D.C. (Jan. 23, 2018)—The Judge David L. Bazelon Center for Mental Health Law, a national legal advocacy organization advancing the rights of people with mental disabilities, announced that it has partnered with Steptoe & Johnson LLP, an international law firm headquartered in Washington, D.C., to counsel and support students facing discrimination on their college and university campuses due to their mental health disabilities.

According to the 2016 National College Health Assessment, almost 40% of college students reported that they felt “so depressed it was difficult to function” at some point in the prior 12 months, while 19% felt overwhelming anxiety, and 10% had seriously considered suicide. These students often report problems obtaining reasonable accommodations for their mental health disabilities from their schools, and have faced punitive discrimination when taking voluntary medical leave or being forced to take involuntary leaves of absence. Some students also report being disciplined by their colleges for conduct related to their disability.

Nearly all universities are subject to the Americans with Disabilities Act and Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, and those that provide housing are subject to the Fair Housing Act. As a result, students facing discrimination due to their mental health disabilities may have legal claims to bring against their schools. Many students also benefit from legal counsel while following their schools’ internal grievance or appeal processes after being denied requested accommodations or being subjected to discriminatory disciplinary procedures.

“By working together, Steptoe and Bazelon will be able to help more students who are discriminated against by their schools because they have a mental health disability,” said Maura Klugman, a staff attorney at the Bazelon Center. “Most of these students just want to attend class and graduate alongside their peers, and together with Steptoe, we will be able to help that happen for students who otherwise might not receive the support and legal counsel they need to stay on campus.”

The first stage of the partnership began in December 2017 with a training session led by Bazelon Center attorneys specializing in mental health law. At the training, Steptoe lawyers became familiar with the law related to campus mental health discrimination, including lessons from past cases where Bazelon has represented students with mental health disabilities who were being discriminated against by their schools. Going forward, Bazelon will refer campus mental health discrimination cases to Steptoe lawyers, who will be able to take the lead on these cases, whether by counseling students or bringing litigation on behalf of such students against their colleges and universities.

“As a firm that has a long and rich tradition of public service that is an integral part of our institution, we are delighted to be partnering with Bazelon on this important initiative,” said Jane Ryan, a Steptoe partner involved in the project. “For far too long, young people exhibiting signs of mental health disabilities have not been given the support they need. Through this program, we will serve as their advocates to make sure that they are not discriminated against by their schools and can overcome the challenges that they face.”

Bazelon will continue to grow the project by working with other groups to promote itself as a resource for students with mental health disabilities. The Bazelon Center also recently published “Campus Mental Health: Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs,” which is available as a free download at: <https://tinyurl.com/MHFactSheet>. The publication serves as a guide to help college students navigate mental health disability rights on their college and university campuses.

For information about the Bazelon Center for Mental Health Law, please visit www.bazelon.org. For more information about Steptoe, please visit <https://www.steptoe.com/>.

About The Judge David L. Bazelon Center for Mental Health Law

The Judge David L. Bazelon Center for Mental Health Law is a national legal advocacy organization protecting and advancing the rights of people with mental disabilities. The Center promotes laws and policies that enable people with mental disabilities to live independently in their own homes and communities, and to enjoy the same opportunities that everyone else does. For more information, visit www.bazelon.org.

About Steptoe & Johnson LLP

Steptoe & Johnson LLP is an international law firm widely recognized for vigorous advocacy in complex litigation and arbitration, successful representation of clients before governmental agencies, and creative and practical advice in guiding business transactions. The firm has more than 500 lawyers and other professionals in offices in Beijing, Brussels, Chicago, London, Los Angeles, New York, Phoenix, San Francisco, and Washington. For more information, visit www.steptoe.com.

#