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DISABILITY RIGHTS OHIO AND PARTNERS REACH GROUND-BREAKING SETTLEMENT AGREEMENT WITH STATE OF OHIO IN SPECIAL EDUCATION CLASS-ACTION LAWSUIT

COLUMBUS, OHIO (November 8, 2018) – A settlement agreement reached in the longstanding *Doe v. State of Ohio* special education class action lawsuit will improve the academic achievement of students with disabilities, in part by supporting their inclusion in regular classrooms. The settlement is expected over the next five years to improve the state’s support for special education throughout Ohio, as well as create measurable improvements in student performance and inclusion for children with disabilities in 11 of Ohio’s large urban school districts. Disability Rights Ohio (DRO), the Judge David L. Bazelon Center for Mental Health Law, and the law firm Steptoe & Johnson celebrate this agreement and thank Ohio Governor John Kasich, the Ohio Department of Education and the State School Board for their efforts to arrive at this important outcome.

Among other things, the settlement requires special efforts by the state to improve test scores and rates of inclusion in 11 school districts – Akron, Canton, Cincinnati, Cleveland, Columbus, Dayton, Lima, East Cleveland, Toledo, Youngstown and Zanesville – which currently have very poor academic outcomes for students with disabilities and high levels of segregation. DRO and the state will now work together to create a plan that will reverse those deficits. The plan will include effective strategies for improving literacy and other supports for students and classroom teachers, such as evidence-based behavior support. The settlement will also provide more help for students as they transition from high school to employment, further education, and independent living.

The settlement will not go into effect until after an agreement is reached on Plaintiffs’ attorneys fees and the Court approves the agreement. The final decision on whether the settlement takes effect is the Court’s.

“This settlement will create a court-enforceable plan that should open many doors of opportunity for students with disabilities who are currently shut out of a quality education in Ohio,” says Kerstin Sjoberg, Director of Advocacy and Assistant Executive Director at DRO. “We are excited to join forces with the state to support student achievement on so many levels.”

“This is a ground-breaking agreement. Ohio will roll up its sleeves and do the work required to help kids with disabilities learn, advance from grade to grade, and graduate,” said Ira Burnim, Legal Director at the Judge David L. Bazelon Center for Mental Health law. “We hope the agreement sets a precedent and provides a model for improving student achievement nationwide.”

Parents in the 11 urban districts that are a focus of the settlement may contact DRO to learn more about how the settlement might affect their students.

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About Disability Rights Ohio

Disability Rights Ohio is the federally and state designated Protection and Advocacy System and Client Assistance Program for the state of Ohio. The mission of Disability Rights Ohio is to advocate for the human, civil and legal rights of people with disabilities in Ohio. Disability Rights Ohio provides legal advocacy and rights protection to a wide range of people with disabilities. Find more information at disabilityrightsohio.org.

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

For over 100 years Steptoe & Johnson LLP has earned an international reputation for vigorous and successful advocacy in litigation and arbitration, and for creative representation of clients before government agencies and in business transactions. Pro bono service at Steptoe, and fostering the public interest in major cases like the present matter, is an integral part of the firm’s ethos, history, and operations.