

Judge David L.

BAZELON CENTER
for Mental Health Law

NEWS

Mayor Joins DCPS in Struggle to Meet Special Education Requirements

April 12, 2007 —This week lawyers from Mayor Adrian Fenty's office joined DCPS lawyers at the second status hearing in months concerning *Blackman and Jones v District of Columbia*. Lawyers for the Defendants told US District Judge Paul Friedman about a "collaboration at the highest levels of DC government" in an effort to meet compliance targets set by the court-approved Consent Decree of July 2006. The Decree requires that Defendants eliminate or reduce the "backlogs" of DCPS students awaiting special education hearings and services.

The Plaintiffs' legal team, led by attorneys at the Bazelon Center for Mental Health Law, welcomed the involvement of the Mayor's Office.

"We are encouraged by the District's plans to appoint case managers to ensure implementation of special education services and by the heightened efforts to reform the information technology systems which track the progress of students in special education," said Bazelon Center Attorney Edith Coakley.

However, the Plaintiffs remain concerned about the Defendants' lack of progress on many of the topics identified by the Evaluation Team's Interim Report of February 2007, most critical, the grossly understaffed DCPS' Non Public Unit, which places approximately twenty percent of all special education students into private schools.

Judge Friedman's reply to these efforts was, "I really don't have to listen to promises and commitments [from the District of Columbia] any more... they're encapsulated in the Consent Decree, which is now signed and sealed in blood."

The next status hearing is scheduled for May.