

Bazelon Center Announces Robert Bernstein's Retirement After Nearly Two Decades of Groundbreaking Leadership

August 15, 2016 – Today the Judge David L. Bazelon Center for Mental Health Law announced the planned retirement of its longtime CEO, Robert Bernstein, PhD, who has led the Center for nearly 20 years. During his tenure, the Center was responsible for landmark legal and public policy victories that have markedly improved the lives of people with mental illness and disabilities.

Bazelon Board of Trustees Chairwoman Nikki Heidepriem thanked Bernstein for his longstanding service and commitment to the Center. "In his two decades at the helm, Bob Bernstein has done more than stay true to the Center's mission of protecting and expanding the rights of adults and children with mental disabilities," she said. "He has worked to broaden the impact of its work, and has thus ensured that many more people benefit from the organization's achievements. We deeply appreciate his years of dedicated service and are gratified that, even in retirement, he is committed to contributing to the Center's continued success."

Heidepriem announced that the Board has hired Janice Frey-Angel, MSW to serve as the Center's interim CEO while board members conduct a search for Bernstein's permanent replacement. Frey-Angel began her leadership of the Center on August 15, 2016.

The role Bazelon played in the [U.S. Supreme Court's 1999 decision in *Olmstead v. L.C.*](#) is perhaps the Center's most important work during Bernstein's long and productive tenure. It is the quintessential example of how the organization achieves and builds on its victories on behalf of children and adults with mental disabilities.

Based on the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA), the High Court ruled 6-3 that the needless segregation and isolation inherent in institutional confinement of mentally disabled people amount to discrimination based on disability. The decision required that states provide treatment and housing for people with mental disabilities in community settings with appropriate supports and access to family and social contacts, work and educational opportunities.

"When I joined the Bazelon Center as its CEO in 1997, I was already aware of the importance and impact of its work," Bernstein said. "With our victory in *Olmstead*, we were able to engage the expertise and dedication of the Center staff to initiate a true transformation in the delivery of mental health care in this country."

Using the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) and the Supreme Court's *Olmstead* decision, the Center has pushed federal, state and local governments to address homelessness, needless incarceration, denial of voting rights and the need for meaningful employment for people with serious mental illness. Its efforts to end the "school-to-prison pipeline" have led education systems across the country to adopt policies that emphasize positive supports over punishment and give students with disabilities opportunities to succeed in the classroom.

Interim CEO Frey-Angel specializes in serving in a transitional leadership capacity for nonprofits, drawing on long experience in developing and implementing effective solutions to strengthen and sustain nonprofit organizations. Her training as a clinical social worker with a background in mental health, family therapy, disability services, domestic violence, and crisis intervention makes her an

ideal partner for the Center's staff and board in this transition period. Frey-Angel said, "I look forward to building on Bazon Center's rich history, success and strong brand to ensure the continuity and sustainability of the Center going forward."

The Center is planning an event to celebrate Dr. Bernstein's long service, significant impact and his legacy of service to the mental health community.

#

For additional information, please contact: Jennifer Sharp, Director of External Affairs
at jennifers@bazelon.org.