

Newly-Released Guide Aims to Protect the Voting Rights of People with Mental Disabilities

September 27, 2016 – Today, National Voter Registration Day, a newly-updated voting rights guide for people with mental disabilities was released by the Bazelon Center, the National Disability Rights Network, the Autistic Self-Advocacy Network, and leading law firm Schulte, Roth & Zabel.

The guide, “*Vote. It’s Your Right: A Guide to the Voting Rights of People with Mental Disabilities*” lists key legal principles and focuses on four areas of concern: 1) voter-competence requirements, 2) state photo-ID laws, 3) voter challenges and 4) providing help to voters with disabilities. The guide also includes an updated chart listing each state’s laws affecting the voting rights of people with mental disabilities.

The guide provides information about state laws and practices that limit the voting rights of people with mental disabilities and offers tools to help people with disabilities preserve or restore their voting rights.

Laws that block people with disabilities from voting based on guardianship status are "based on a faulty stereotype" that these people "are incapable of making informed choices," said Lewis Bossing, Senior Staff Attorney at the Bazelon Center for Mental Health Law. Similarly, requiring voters with disabilities to answer questions not asked of other voters impermissibly discriminates. “Such arbitrary disenfranchisement violates federal law,” said Jennifer Mathis, Director of Policy and Legal Advocacy at the Bazelon Center for Mental Health Law. “We produced this guide to provide needed clarity and ensure that people with mental disabilities can exercise their right to vote like every other citizen.”

“People with disabilities deserve to have their basic rights and freedoms protected like all other Americans. The right to vote should not be any different,” said Michelle Bishop, National Disability Rights Network Advocacy Voting Rights Specialist. Samantha Crane, Autistic Self Advocacy Network Legal Director and Director of Public Policy, added that “We need to make sure that people with disabilities and their supporters know their rights, so that nobody is illegally prevented from voting on election day.”

“Voting is an important expression of freedom, and this guide will serve as a vital resource to help preserve the rights of people with mental disabilities,” added Craig Stein, Schulte Roth & Zabel partner and co-head of the Structured Finance & Derivatives Group.

Vote. It’s Your Right. is available as a free PDF to download from the Bazelon Center’s website, at www.bazelon.org/Where-We-Stand/Self-Determination/Voting/Voting-Policy-Documents.aspx To obtain print copies please email pubs@bazelon.org.

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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 representing people with mental disabilities. It promotes laws and policies that enable people with

disabilities to exercise their life choices and participate fully in their communities. More info at www.bazelon.org.

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Autistic Self Advocacy Network

The Autistic Self Advocacy Network is a 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization run by and for Autistic people. The Autistic Self Advocacy Network seeks to advance the principles of the disability rights movement with regard to autism. ASAN believes that the goal of autism advocacy should be a world in which Autistic people enjoy the same access, rights, and opportunities as all other citizens. We work to empower Autistic people across the world to take control of our own lives and the future of our common community, and seek to organize the Autistic community to ensure our voices are heard in the national conversation about us. Nothing About Us, Without Us! More info at www.autisticadvocacy.org

National Disability Rights Network

The National Disability Rights Network (NDRN) works to improve the lives of people with disabilities by guarding against abuse; advocating for basic rights; and ensuring accountability in health care, education, employment, housing, transportation, and within the juvenile and criminal justice systems. NDRN is the nonprofit membership organization for the federally mandated Protection and Advocacy (P&A) Systems and the Client Assistance Programs (CAP) for individuals with disabilities. More info at: www.ndrn.org

Schulte Roth & Zabel LLP (SRZ)

Schulte Roth & Zabel (www.srz.com) is a full-service law firm with offices in New York, Washington, D.C. and London. As one of the leading law firms serving the financial services industry, the firm regularly advises clients on corporate and transactional matters, as well as providing counsel on regulatory, compliance, enforcement and investigative issues. As a leader in pro bono legal work, the firm advises nearly 50 not-for-profits with diverse missions, on a range of legal matters. It has also, through litigation, secured housing for hundreds of thousands of victims of Hurricane Katrina, and successfully forced the State of New York to provide counsel to indigent defendants. Because of the firm's enduring commitment to its pro bono practice, SRZ was named one of the Top 10 Leading Law Firms for Pro Bono by Who's Who Legal 2015, and was recognized with *New York Law Journal's* Lawyers Who Lead by Example 2015 Pro Bono Award.