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Contact: Kelly Darr 215-238-8070 Ext. 221

## ***Pennsylvania Department of Public Welfare and Secretary Alexander Named in Class Action Lawsuit***

**Crisis Imminent for Adults with Disabilities –  
Most Support Services to be Eliminated on January 1**

**Harrisburg, PA (December 1, 2011)** – Disability Rights Network of Pennsylvania today filed a class action lawsuit against the Pennsylvania Department of Public Welfare and its Secretary, Gary Alexander, for violating Title XIX of the Social Security Act, the Americans with Disabilities Act, and the Rehabilitation Act. The lawsuit is on behalf of Rebecca Leonard, Matthew Leonard, Elisa Anslow and other individuals who have autism, brain injury, and other disabilities and who receive services funded through the OBRA Waiver. In October, the Department of Public Welfare (DPW) announced plans to eliminate and/or severely restrict vital services that allow these individuals to safely live and work in their communities. The cuts are set to go into effect January 1, 2012.

“These cuts are destabilizing a group of individuals that need, and had in fact achieved, stability to lead independent and integrated lives where they can work, attend college, live in their own homes, support local businesses, and volunteer in their communities,” says Kelly Darr, Legal Director at Disability Rights Network of Pennsylvania. “Providers are sending termination notices and families and individuals are panicking, because DPW’s ill-advised decisions do not provide for any appropriate replacement services. This is a giant and expensive step backward.”

Rebecca and Matthew Leonard, 40 and 44 years of age respectively, are diagnosed with severe autism. Their parents, both in their mid 70s, are party to the complaint. “Our two children have been living in the community for 10 years with ongoing support services. They are employed part time, pay taxes, use local banks and are learning to manage their resources,” says Joe Leonard. “Without adequate supports, our children and others risk institutionalization or psychiatric hospitalization that will greatly increase the costs to taxpayers and cost our children their homes, their jobs and their lives in the community.”

According to the complaint, “Without Community Integration Services and Behavior Therapy or appropriate and available alternatives that can meet their needs, Plaintiffs and other similarly situated individuals will regress, losing the community living skills that they have worked to attain and some will deteriorate behaviorally. Some may be required to accept services, if available, in more segregated settings than are appropriate to meet their needs. Some may no longer be able to live in their own homes, forcing family members -- many of whom are aging, ill, or have other responsibilities -- to care for them.”

Disability Rights Network of Pennsylvania is asking the court certify the case as a class action, declare that Defendants' actions violate federal law, and issue appropriate injunctive relief to stop the cuts from going into effect on January 1.

Disability Rights Network of Pennsylvania works to advance, protect, and advocate for the human, civil, and legal rights of Pennsylvanians with disabilities. For more information contact Kelly Darr at Disability Rights Network of Pennsylvania at 215-238-8070 Ext 221 or visit [www.drnpa.org](http://www.drnpa.org).

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