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Ohio Department of Education and Disability Rights Ohio Receive Preliminary Approval for Reaching Settlement in Class-action Lawsuit

The agreement will outline a plan to improve the integration and academic achievement of Ohio students with disabilities

Columbus Ohio – Nov. 18, 2019 –The Honorable Judge Michael H. Watson of the United States District Court for the Southern District of Ohio has granted preliminary approval to a comprehensive settlement agreement in the class action *Doe v. State of Ohio*, case number 2:91-cv-00464. Disability Rights Ohio (DRO), the Judge Bazelon Center for Mental Health Law, and the law firm of Steptoe & Johnson worked with the Ohio Department of Education to reach a settlement that will improve the State’s support for special education throughout Ohio, as well as support measurable improvements in student performance and inclusion for children with disabilities in 11 of Ohio’s school districts. The settlement will be in effect for five years.

The settlement requires extra support to improve experiences and outcomes for students with disabilities in 11 school districts – Akron, Canton, Cincinnati, Cleveland, Columbus, Dayton, Lima, East Cleveland, Toledo, Youngstown and Zanesville –which currently have lower academic outcomes for students with disabilities. The plan will build upon *Each Child, Our Future*, Ohio’s strategic plan for education and the Ohio Department of Education’s developing plan aimed at improving learning experiences and outcomes for students with disabilities. The plan will promote effective teaching and administrative strategies for improving literacy, positive behavioral interventions and supports, and meeting the individualized learning needs of students. The settlement will ensure more options are available for students as they transition from high school to employment, further education, and independent living.

“This settlement could not have been reached without the collaborative effort of our partners and the Ohio Department of Education. Together we were committed to reaching a comprehensive settlement that will improve outcomes for students with disabilities in real and concrete ways,” says Kerstin Sjoberg, director of advocacy and assistant executive director at DRO. “We are excited to join forces with ODE to support a statewide plan that will enhance academic achievement, promote inclusion, and improve the supports students with disabilities receive in school.”

“Equity is a core principle of Ohio’s strategic plan for education,” says Paolo DeMaria, state superintendent of public instruction. “The settlement affirms the objective of meeting the needs of all children, no matter the challenges they face, with the goal of ensuring they are prepared and empowered for a fulfilling post-high school path.”

The class members now have the opportunity to submit comments on the Settlement Agreement before the Judge holds a fairness hearing. More details about how to submit those comments can be found on DRO’s website <https://www.disabilityrightsohio.org/special-education#Doe>. Parents and students who have questions can contact DRO to learn more about how the settlement might affect them.

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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.