



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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**As *Dixon* Ends, Children's Law Center Urges the District to Focus
on Improving Children's Mental Health**

WASHINGTON, DC (September 12, 2011) – Children's Law Center warns that while the District deserves credit for making enough progress to exit the *Dixon* class action lawsuit, the children's mental health system remains in need of major reforms and improvements.

While the District has addressed many problems identified as key issues when the lawsuit was filed over 30 years ago, the lawsuit did not go far enough in demanding improvements in mental health care specifically for children. As a result, children's mental health care is still in a desperate state. The *Dixon* settlement is an opportunity for the District to shift its focus to developing a range of comprehensive, child-friendly and community-based mental health services.

"I applaud the Mayor and the Department of Mental Health for their leadership and the important work they have done to comply with the *Dixon* exit criteria," said Judith Sandalow, executive director of Children's Law Center. "But I cannot see this as a victory when there is a startling lack of mental health services for children. I will celebrate when I stop seeing children go without mental health services until a crisis brings them to the ER. I will celebrate when no more teenagers have to be sent so far away from home to get the treatment they need because there are simply no community programs in the city that can meet their needs."

The District only provides services to 5% of its children, despite acknowledging that many more need services. The quality of these services continues to be inconsistent; DMH's Consumer Service Review process found that children and youth receive care "in the acceptable range" in only 59% of cases.

"We are facing a crisis," Sandalow said. "The District is seeking to reform our schools, reduce violence in our neighborhoods and strengthen our families – yet the backbone of all of these is a high-quality, easily accessible mental health system. If this system is fragmented and underfunded, other initiatives will falter."

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About Children's Law Center

Children's Law Center works to give every child in the District of Columbia a solid foundation of family, health and education. We are the largest provider of free legal services in the District and the only to focus on children. Our 70-person staff partners with local pro bono attorneys to serve 1,200 at-risk children each year. We use this expertise to advocate for changes in the District's laws, policies and programs. For more information, visit www.childrenslawcenter.org.