

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
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The State's failure to pay is shortchanging Alaska's special needs students.

ALASKA - Lakeview NeuroRehab Center in Wisconsin has filed a federal lawsuit to recover over one million dollars owed by the State of Alaska and Alaska school districts for educational services provided to Alaska's children.

Thirty-nine students received residential psychiatric treatment services from Lakeview between December 1999 and January 2008. These services were unavailable within Alaska and, in accordance with the Interstate Compact on the Placement of Children, the State approved the students' placement at Lakeview.

While residing at Lakeview, these students were provided both residential psychiatric treatment and special education and related services. Alaska Medicaid paid for the residential psychiatric treatment. However, the educational services provided these students -- costing approximately \$1.6 million dollars -- is not covered by Medicaid. Despite Lakeview's numerous attempts to recover the educational debt owed from the Alaska Department of Education and Early Development and the Alaska Department of Health and Social Services, as well as the school districts of these students, the bill remains unpaid.

The Disability Law Center of Alaska is concerned that the State's and school districts' failure to pay this debt has irresponsibly closed treatment options for Alaska's special needs students. "While we are a strong proponent for community-based care, we also recognize that a full continuum of services must be available to meet the individual needs of Alaskan students' with disabilities. The State's failure to pay its bills has carelessly eliminated options on that continuum" according to Meg Allison, staff attorney with the Disability Law Center, which will serve as co-counsel in the lawsuit.

Over the last several years, the state of Alaska has been engaged in earnest efforts to ensure that psychiatric services for children are available within the state, close to their families and community supports. Until that goal is realized, Alaska must maintain access to essential services elsewhere. Such access will be denied to Alaskan children, however, if the State continues to ignore its fiscal responsibilities.

Among those named in the lawsuit are: Sarah Palin, in her official capacity as Governor of Alaska; Alaska Department of Education and Early Development; Alaska Department of Health and Social Services; Anchorage School District; Juneau School District; Fairbanks North Star Borough School District; Matanuska-Susitna Borough School District; Lower Yukon School District; North Slope Borough School District; Wrangell Public School District; Southwest Region School District; Delta Greely School District; Kenai Peninsula School District; and Yakutat School District.

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