



For Immediate Release

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Equal Rights Center and Howard University Hospitals Reach Agreement to Make Family Health Center More Accessible

WASHINGTON, D.C., January 3, 2010 – The Equal Rights Center (ERC), a national non-profit civil rights organization, Antoine Rhodes, Angela Vaughn, and Howard University Hospital announced today their agreement and initiative to make the hospital's Family Health Center building, services, and examination rooms more accessible to people with disabilities.

“When informed of barriers to accessibility at the Family Health Clinic, Howard University immediately began working with the Equal Rights Center to take the necessary steps to ensure all patients are treated equally and receive proper medical care,” said Jennifer Wolfsheimer, the ERC’s Disability Rights Manager. “A health center should be a safe harbor for all individuals and these improvements will better the lives of the entire community using the health center.”

Rhodes and Vaughn, both residents of the District of Columbia, ERC members, and wheelchair-users, came to the ERC in the spring of 2009 with complaints about the facilities and services they encountered at the Center. After receiving these complaints, the ERC surveyed the hospital and found many accessibility issues—including the physical structure of the building as well as practices—that were contrary to the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA), the federal law which requires places of public accommodation to be accessible to people with disabilities, and the District of Columbia Human Rights Act.

“A medical clinic is one place where you should expect accessible care and services,” said Vaughn. “I am thankful Howard University Hospital has agreed to make changes so people with disabilities have the same quality of care as non-disabled individuals.”

Howard University Hospitals has agreed to make changes to several aspects of the Family Health Center building and its policies in order to comply with the ADA. These changes include the installation of accessible exterior and interior doors, and accessible security desk; modifications of their reception counter, payments window, public telephone, restroom, and water fountain; establishing a designated wheelchair accessible examination room; the purchase of a wheelchair accessible scale; and establishing a training program for all employees on disability awareness, including the use of appropriate techniques for transferring and positioning patients with disabilities.

“Howard University’s Family Health Center’s mission to ‘serve the needs of families by focusing on health maintenance and disease prevention’ will be advanced by these steps to make the center more accessible,” said Elaine Gardner, Disability Rights Project Director at the Washington Lawyers’ Committee for Civil Rights and Urban Affairs. “Ensuring all

individuals have equal access to the proper medical care is essential in promoting good health in a large segment of our population.”

In an effort to ensure people with disabilities do not encounter similar forms of discrimination, the ERC has began an initiative to educate people with disabilities about their rights and health care providers about their responsibilities and, when necessary, advocacy and enforcement directed at those who violate the laws protecting people with disabilities.

The Equal Rights Center, Rhodes, and Vaughn, were all represented in this matter by the Washington Lawyers’ Committee for Civil Rights & Urban Affairs and the law firm of Jenner & Block LLP.

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About the Equal Rights Center (www.equalrightscenter.org)

Since 1983, the Equal Rights Center (ERC), a national non-profit civil rights organization, has worked to identify, challenge, and eliminate discrimination. The ERC combats discrimination in housing, employment, access to public accommodations and government services, disability rights and immigrant rights, through education and outreach, research, testing, counseling, advocacy and enforcement.

About the Washington Lawyers’ Committee for Civil Rights and Urban Affairs (<http://www.washlaw.org>)

The Washington Lawyers’ Committee for Civil Rights and Urban Affairs was established in 1968 to provide pro bono legal services to address issues of discrimination and entrenched poverty. Since its founding, the Committee has handled more than 5,000 cases on behalf of individuals and advocacy organizations in the areas of equal employment, fair housing, public accommodations, public education, asylum and refugee rights, and disability rights. For more information about the Committee, see www.washlaw.org. The Committee can be reached at 202.319.1000.