

NEWS RELEASE

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DISABILITY RIGHTS NEW JERSEY FILES LAWSUIT AGAINST ESSEX COUNTY JUVENILE DETENTION CENTER TO ENFORCE ITS RIGHT TO INVESTIGATE ABUSE AND NEGLECT

TRENTON, NJ – Disability Rights New Jersey, the State’s designated Protection and Advocacy system for people with disabilities, filed a lawsuit in the United States District Court of New Jersey against Essex County Juvenile Detention Center, the Detention Center’s Warden, and Director, to enforce its right to access the facility and investigate allegations of abuse and neglect.

As New Jersey’s designated Protection and Advocacy system, federal law authorizes Disability Rights New Jersey to monitor and investigate settings where people with disabilities live and receive services, as they do in the Essex County Juvenile Detention Center. Unannounced, unaccompanied access to settings and access to records are central to the investigation authority that Congress imparted to Protection and Advocacy systems.

Gwen Orlowski, Executive Director of Disability Rights New Jersey said, “We seek to enforce our well-established right to investigate alleged abuse and neglect of youth with disabilities in exactly the type of setting that Congress contemplated when creating the Protection & Advocacy system.”

Disability Rights New Jersey’s Youth Justice Project received reports of alleged abuse, neglect, and systemic rights violations at the Essex County Juvenile Detention Center. The Youth Justice Project aims to decriminalize disability for youth in underserved communities by representing youth with disabilities impacted by the criminal justice system in Mercer and Essex counties.

“Youth with disabilities in institutional settings, like the residents of Essex County Juvenile Detention Center, are particularly vulnerable due to their segregation,” said Jill Hoegel, Director of Investigations and Monitoring at Disability Rights New Jersey. “It is imperative that our organization is able to use all tools available under federal law to swiftly investigate any allegations of abuse and neglect, including our right to access and photograph facilities and our right to conduct private interviews with individuals with disabilities.”

This lawsuit seeks to enforce Disability Rights New Jersey’s access authority to investigate these allegations of abuse and neglect to fulfill Disability Rights New Jersey’s mandate to protect and advocate for individuals with disabilities in New Jersey.

[A copy of the complaint can be viewed here.](#)

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About Disability Rights New Jersey:

As New Jersey's designated Protection and Advocacy system for people with disabilities, under federal law, Disability Rights New Jersey promotes self-determination, independence, and inclusion into all facets of community life. Disability Rights New Jersey advances the human, civil, and legal rights of people with disabilities through a wide array of advocacy services for individuals, their families, and other stakeholders. Accordingly, Disability Rights New Jersey also has statutory authority to pursue legal, administrative, and other appropriate remedies to ensure the protection of people with disabilities and adherence to the law.

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FOR MORE INFORMATION, PLEASE CONTACT:

Dana Caro, Director of Communications and Individual Giving
Disability Rights New Jersey
210 S. Broad St, 3rd Floor
Trenton, NJ 08608
dcaro@disabilityrightsnj.org
vm: 609.984.1880