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**PARENTS AND ADVOCATES SUE STATE OF GEORGIA,
OVER SEPARATE AND UNEQUAL EDUCATION FOR
THOUSANDS OF STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES**

Parents of Children With Disabilities, The Georgia Advocacy Office, The Center for Public Representation, The Bazelon Center for Mental Health Law, The Arc, DLA Piper LLP, and The Goodmark Firm File Class Action Lawsuit Against State of Georgia

ATLANTA, GA (Oct. 11, 2017) – A class action lawsuit was filed in federal court today complaining that the State of Georgia has discriminated against thousands of public school students with disabilities by providing them with a separate and unequal education via the State’s Georgia Network for Educational and Therapeutic Supports Program (GNETS).

The complaint filed in United States District Court for the Northern District of Georgia, alleges that the State, in denying GNETS students the opportunity to be educated with their non-disabled peers in neighborhood schools, violates the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA), Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, and the Fourteenth Amendment to the United States Constitution. For more information about the litigation, please visit www.centerforpublicrep.org/court_case/gao-v-georgia/.

The suit was filed by parents of children with disabilities, the Georgia Advocacy Office, the Center for Public Representation, the Bazelon Center for Mental Health Law, The Arc, DLA Piper LLP, and the Goodmark Law Firm.

GNETS are segregated programs that serve only students with disabilities, housed in entirely separate buildings or in separate wings of neighborhood schools, for students who need services for their disability-related behaviors. In 2016, over 5,000 students with disabilities were placed in GNETS. Most of these students are African-American and 100% of the students enrolled experience disabilities.

GNETS students are denied access to physical education, art, music, and extra-curricular activities, and many GNETS centers have no library, cafeteria, gym, science lab, music room, or playground. Instruction in GNETS classrooms is often performed via online programs rather than with certified teachers, and educational curricula are not aligned with State standards. Accordingly, GNETS students rarely earn a diploma. In fact, the GNETS graduation rate is only 10% in contrast to a nearly 80% graduation rate in neighborhood schools. Students in GNETS are also physically restrained on a routine basis, nearly 10,000 times in 2014-2016.

Previously, the U.S. Department of Justice [performed a multi-year investigation](http://www.ada.gov/olmstead/documents/gnets_lof.pdf) (www.ada.gov/olmstead/documents/gnets_lof.pdf) of GNETS, and ultimately filed suit against Georgia alleging that the State’s administration of the program violates the ADA by “unnecessarily segregating students with disabilities from their peers” and providing “unequal” education opportunities to GNETS

students. That lawsuit has been put on hold pending a decision from the 11th Circuit Court of Appeals regarding DOJ's authority to bring suit.

[About The Arc \(www.thearc.org\)](http://www.thearc.org)

[About the The Judge David L. Bazelon Center for Mental Health Law \(www.bazelon.org\)](http://www.bazelon.org)

[About The Center for Public Representation \(www.centerforpublicrep.org\)](http://www.centerforpublicrep.org)

[About DLA Piper LLP \(www.dlapiper.com/en/us\)](http://www.dlapiper.com/en/us)

[About The Georgia Advocacy Office \(www.thegao.org\)](http://www.thegao.org)

[About The Goodmark Law Firm \(www.goodmarklaw.com\)](http://www.goodmarklaw.com)