



## Federal Court Affirms Settlement Favoring Legal Aid Clients, Approves \$1.138 Million for Costs, Attorney Fees

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### FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE:

(Minneapolis, Minn.) — The U.S. District Court of Minnesota has given final approval to the settlement agreement reached on behalf of legal aid clients in the federal class action lawsuit, [Murphy, et al. v Harpstead](#). The represented class are people with disabilities living in group homes who had not been informed about nor given the opportunity to live in settings outside of those group homes.

Senior United States District Court Judge Donovan Frank stated in the order, "From the beginning, this case has been about individual choice... The Named Plaintiffs in this case—Tenner Murphy, Marrie Bottleson, and Dionne Swanson—allege that Defendant failed to provide them with an informed choice about accessing more individualized housing options." Bottleson's experience speaks to the heart of the case, "I lived in a group home for 17 years and couldn't do what I wanted to do. This case helped me have my own life."

Mid-Minnesota Legal Aid's Minnesota Disability Law Center, with attorneys at Anthony Ostlund Louwagie, Dressen and Boyland P.A. and Nichols Kaster, PPLP, sought relief seven years ago with the first filing made to the court in August 2016. A [preliminary settlement](#) reached in July of 2022 is what the court has now approved. The settlement calls for the defendant, "Jodi Harpstead, in her Capacity as Commissioner of the Minnesota Department of Human Services," to: (1) inform and educate; (2) train; (3) assess; (4) provide services; and (5) measure outcomes [for members of the class, who are persons living in group homes, 18 and older, who have received a Disability Waiver and live in a licensed CRS facility. Defendant will also pay plaintiffs' attorney fees."

Legal Aid Attorney Justin Perl notes, "This is the largest award of fees ever granted to Mid-Minnesota Legal Aid. It recognizes the zealous representation we put forth for our clients, our fortitude in seeking systemic changes when the law is not followed, and will allow us to continue our work for social justice."

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