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Federal Court Preliminarily Approves Settlement to Improve Access to Public Benefits for People with Disabilities in Suffolk County

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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A federal district court judge in the Eastern District of New York has granted preliminary approval to a class action [settlement](#) reflecting the Suffolk County Department of Social Services (SCDSS) commitment to update and enhance its policies and procedures to ensure people with disabilities are able to access public benefits. The class action settlement resolves litigation brought against SCDSS in 2019 by Suffolk County residents with disabilities who could not access the reasonable accommodations they needed to participate in public benefit programs, such as Medicaid, SNAP (commonly known as Food Stamps), Temporary Assistance, and Temporary Housing Assistance. The plaintiffs in this lawsuit were represented by the [National Center for Law and Economic Justice](#), Empire Justice Center, and Dentons US LLP.

The settlement agreement requires SCDSS to update its ADA policies and trainings, commits the agency to training all staff on the new ADA policies, modifies SCDSS's computer system to track accommodation requests, clarifies the internal agency processes for promptly responding to accommodation requests including situations of immediate need, clarifies the right of an applicant or recipient to file a grievance if SCDSS denies a request for an accommodation, and affirms the rights of applicants and recipients with disabilities to request an accommodation verbally or in writing at any point in their dealings with the agency.

"This case is about ensuring that every eligible Suffolk County resident has a fair and equal opportunity to obtain critical and sustaining public assistance benefits" remarked Linda Hassberg, Senior Attorney, Empire Justice Center.

"The comprehensive nature of the settlement is a real victory for thousands of Suffolk County residents with disabilities" said Sandra Hauser, Partner, Dentons US LLP.

“The negotiated changes to Defendant’s policies and procedures will ensure access for Suffolk County residents with disabilities,” said NCLEJ Skadden Fellow Jordan Berger. “Having a disability should never be a barrier to accessing critically needed benefits and services.”

On September 6, 2022 at 1:00PM EST a federal court in Central Islip will hold a fairness hearing to receive input about the proposed settlement in *Newkirk v. Pierre*. Class members have the right to attend the hearing by telephone or submit written comments in advance of the hearing to give input to the court reviewing the settlement agreement. To learn more about the settlement and whether you may be a class member, please read the [Notice of Proposed Settlement of Class Action \(available in English and Spanish\)](#) or the [Proposed Settlement](#).

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