



TREATMENT
ADVOCACY
CENTER

NEWS

200 NORTH GLEBE ROAD ♦ SUITE 730 ♦ ARLINGTON, VIRGINIA 22203 ♦ 703 294 6001

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
Wednesday, May 18, 2005

CONTACT:
Alicia Aebersold, at 703 294 6008
or aebersolda@psychlaws.org

FLORIDIANS HONORED WITH NATIONAL MENTAL ILLNESS ADVOCACY AWARD

Mutual tragedy spurs successful reform of Florida law for people with severe mental illnesses

ARLINGTON, VA – The board of directors of the Treatment Advocacy Center today announced that Seminole County Sheriff Donald Eslinger, Linda Gregory of Jacksonville, and Alice Petree of Sanford are the winners of its annual national mental illness advocacy award. The Treatment Advocacy Center (TAC) is a national nonprofit organization dedicated to removing barriers to treatment of severe mental illnesses. May is national mental health month.

Eslinger, Gregory, and Petree won this year's national Torrey Advocacy Commendation for their successful advocacy for a new mental illness treatment law in Florida. The TAC award recognizes the courage and tenacity of those who selflessly advocate – despite criticism and opposition – for the right to treatment for those who are so severely disabled by severe mental illnesses that they do not recognize that they need treatment.

The board of directors of the Treatment Advocacy Center voted unanimously to recognize all three Florida advocates in an unusual move that paralleled an unusual advocacy partnership. “We are impressed by their heart-felt efforts over more than four years to get a more humane treatment law for Floridians with severe mental illnesses,” said TAC board secretary Dr. Fred Frese. “We commend Sheriff Eslinger, Linda Gregory, and Alice Petree for their incredible dedication and effectiveness in spearheading a complex and critical reform of Florida’s outdated treatment law.”

The Florida House of Representatives cited the TAC award in a resolution sponsored by Rep. David Simmons and Rep. Sandra Adams that recognizes these three advocates for “their successful advocacy in honor of Deputy Sheriff Gene Gregory and Alan Singletary and all people with severe mental illnesses who will benefit from their efforts.”

The result of their work is Florida’s new law, which took effect January 1, 2005, that allows assisted (court-ordered) outpatient treatment for people with severe mental illnesses, like schizophrenia and bipolar disorder, who have a history of noncompliance combined with either repeated Baker Act admissions or serious violence. Court-ordered outpatient treatment is a less restrictive, less expensive alternative for those who need intervention but do not require inpatient hospitalization. New statistics from New York, a state with a similar law, show that for those in the program, 74% fewer experienced homelessness, 77% fewer experienced psychiatric hospitalization, 83% fewer experienced arrest, and 87% fewer experienced incarceration. Individuals enrolled were also more likely to regularly participate in services and take prescribed medication.

- MORE -

On July 8, 1998, Deputy Sheriff Gene Gregory and Alan Singletary, a man with a history of severe mental illness, died in a 13-hour standoff. Seminole County Sheriff Eslinger vowed to not let their deaths be in vain, and created a Mental Health Task Force to advocate for reforms in mental health and substance abuse services and laws. With the unlikely team of Alice Petree, the sister of Alan Singletary, and Linda Gregory, the widow of Deputy Sheriff Gene Gregory, Sheriff Eslinger worked, through the task force and with other community groups and stakeholders, to increase awareness of the need for treatment of mental illnesses. With the leadership of the Florida Sheriffs' Association, the efforts of these advocates and the community network they helped to create resulted not only in reforming the Baker Act to allow for assisted outpatient treatment, but also in other beneficial programs for those with mental illnesses such as jail diversion, forensic treatment programs, mental health screening at a county correctional facility, funding for a detox receiving facility, a voluntary identification program, and law enforcement crisis intervention teams.

About the award. The Torrey Advocacy Commendation is presented annually by the Treatment Advocacy Center's Board of Directors. The award is named for Treatment Advocacy Center president and founder Dr. E. Fuller Torrey, M.D., a nationally known and respected psychiatrist, researcher, and advocate whose unflagging resolve to remove barriers to treatment for people with severe mental illnesses sparked a national reform movement. Recipients make a substantial difference for their community through advocacy, awareness, research, or legislation in this field.

The Treatment Advocacy Center (www.psychlaws.org) is a nonprofit organization dedicated to eliminating barriers to timely and humane treatment for millions of Americans with severe mental illnesses.

- END -