



**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE:**

**CORRECTIONS, PARTIES REACH MENTAL HEALTH AGREEMENT**

**COLUMBIA, S.C. (Jan. 15, 2015)** - The South Carolina Department of Corrections (SCDC), the Protection and Advocacy for People with Disabilities, Inc. (P&A), and the class of inmates with serious mental illness who filed the 2005 lawsuit seeking adequate mental health services have reached a preliminary agreement. After months of successful mediation the parties have agreed to a plan that establishes benchmarks for settling the case.

"This is a significant step in the process of a long-term solution," said Bryan Stirling, director of the South Carolina Department of Corrections. "We have been working together to develop a 3-year budget and staffing plan that we hope will be approved by the legislature. Implementation of this plan will be a challenge and will require a great deal of cooperation, however, this is a first step and we look forward to making our prisons safer for the public servants in corrections, inmates and the community," he added.

The parties have been working cooperatively to develop changes and improvements in mental health services. These developments also include significant modifications in security policies and procedures to improve care and custody of all inmates. SCDC is also developing a more appropriate staff culture and training curriculum, including Crisis Intervention Training to improve staff's ability to use conflict avoidance techniques and deescalate crisis situations. SCDC has developed a systematic program for screening and evaluating inmates to more accurately identify those in need of mental health care.

"We have made enough progress during nearly nine months of substantive mediation to believe there's a good possibility of reaching a final settlement with the Department," said Gloria Prevost, executive director of P&A. "We are particularly pleased that the Governor has incorporated into her Executive Budget SCDC's funding projections to increase staffing and improve facilities. We have made considerable progress on revisions to the Department's mental health policies and procedures but have more work to do," she added.

The agreement anticipates the implementation and executive and legislative funding of a 3-year budget, staffing and facilities plan. If funded, the plan will significantly increase SCDC's ability to provide mental health care. SCDC and P&A will continue to meet with national experts to improve mental health policies.