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**Governor Haslam Proclaims March “Developmental Disabilities Awareness Month”**

“Disability is a natural part of the human experience that does not diminish the right of individuals with developmental disabilities to live independently, to exert control and choice over their own lives, and to fully participate in and contribute to their communities through full integration and inclusion …”

- Developmental Disabilities Assistance and Bill of Rights Act of 2000

This month, Governor Bill Haslam signed a proclamation designating March as Developmental Disabilities Awareness Month. Governor Haslam and the Tennessee disability community wishes to recognize the valuable contributions made by individuals with developmental disabilities who live, work, play, vote, volunteer, worship and build relationships in our local communities.

The proclamation states that “families of people with developmental disabilities deserve our admiration and recognition for their caring commitment and ongoing support that are essential to an independent and productive life”. Many individuals with developmental disabilities and their family members still face enormous challenges in accessing needed services and supports to allow them to live successful lives in their communities alongside people without disabilities.

We hope this month that Tennesseans will use Developmental Disabilities Awareness Month to learn how they can become involved in working alongside individuals with developmental disabilities to transform their communities into welcoming and supportive places for people of ALL abilities. Communities are stronger and better for everyone when all citizens are not only accepted but also respected for the contributions they make and their strengths, abilities and gifts.

“Tennessee is a state that values all our citizens, including Tennesseans who have a developmental disability. Developmental Disabilities Awareness Month is a good time for communities across the state to learn about and celebrate the successes of our friends and neighbors with developmental disabilities who have enriched the communities where they live.”

Since Ronald Reagan’s 1987 presidential proclamation, the U.S. has celebrated March as Developmental Disabilities Awareness Month. Over 6 million individuals in the United States have developmental disabilities. A developmental disability, according to the Developmental Disabilities Assistance and Bill of Rights Act, is defined as a severe, chronic disability which originated at birth or during childhood, is expected to continue indefinitely and substantially restricts the individual’s functioning in several major life activities. Examples include but are not limited to autism, traumatic brain injury, intellectual disabilities, cerebral palsy, spina bifida and Down syndrome.

For more information about developmental disabilities, the needs of citizens with developmental disabilities and their families in Tennessee, or the work of the Tennessee Council on Developmental Disabilities, contact Executive Director Wanda Willis at 615-253-5369, wanda.willis@tn.gov or visit www.tn.gov/cdd.

*Local community members with developmental disabilities and family members can be provided upon request for local news coverage.

Learn more about the Tennessee Council on Developmental Disabilities.

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