

**FAMILY BASED SERVICES ASSOCIATION OF NEW JERSEY
RAMP, RENAUD & HLAIVENKA**

PRESS RELEASE

**ATTORNEY ANN RENAUD SAYS LEGAL SYSTEM IS NOT
MEETING NEEDS OF PEOPLE WITH MENTAL HEALTH ISSUES**

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE (Lumberton, NJ, Sept. 21, 2010) – East Brunswick attorney Ann Renaud told a group of people in Burlington County today the judicial system in New Jersey needs to be changed to make it more effective in dealing with cases involving people with mental health issues.

Ms. Renaud was the guest speaker at a meeting of the Family Support Organization of Burlington in Lumberton. Family Support Organizations (FSO's) are family-run, county-based organizations that provide direct family-to-family support and other services to family members of children with emotional and behavioral problems.

“It’s hard to grasp the irony of a system that does nothing for people who are mentally ill and need help until they get in trouble,” Ms. Renaud said. “Then we’re quick to come in and punish them. It’s ludicrous to spend millions of dollars punishing people when for far less we would be treating them.”

Ms. Renaud called for the statewide establishment of a system of mental health courts that specialize in handling cases dealing with people with mental health issues.

“The mental health court model is needed all over the state,” she said. “It’s been shown to work well in other jurisdictions and it’s worked in this state in a few jurisdictions. We need to adopt it statewide.”

Ms. Renaud said the judicial system needs to be remade in a way that deals with mental health issues and drug dependency with compassion and understanding.

“Instead of viewing people as problems that need to be managed, we should all become their advocates and take on the challenge of unleashing the possibilities that exist within them,” she said.

Ms. Renaud said that lawmakers and court officials have given us, at best, a system that is simply inadequate. It hurts the people who need special help as well the communities that will eventually have to deal with them after they’ve failed to receive that help.

“We need to make changes in our court system to take a more compassionate approach in dealing with people who have mental health issues or need drug rehabilitation,” Ms. Renaud said. “I’ve worked in the judicial system as an advocate and as a former municipal court judge. I’ve seen the suffering that can be caused by a system that is not equipped to deal with people with these kinds of issues. It causes them unnecessary suffering

and hurts us as a society.”

Ms. Renaud has called on Gov. Chris Christie to expand mental health courts and to dedicate greater resources for research into mental illnesses and to bring insurance reimbursement for mental health services on par with other health services.

“If our court system continues to view people with mental illnesses and special needs only in terms of labels, it is going to continue this needless suffering,” Ms. Renaud said. “The system as it stands now is not designed to recognize their problems or provide compassionate, common-sense solutions.”

In her blog on www.ramprenaud.com, Renaud wrote, “Despite decades of good intentions on the part of our policymakers and the court system, the justice system in New Jersey today is inadequate. And the price of that failure is being paid not just by those who need help and aren’t getting it, but by all of us. Failing to deal effectively with mental health issues only results in further suffering by the individual and harm to society.”

Renaud, who blogs regularly about the challenges faced by those with mental illness, developmental and intellectual disabilities and substance abuse issues on her website, also took questions from the audience.

About Family Support Organization of Burlington County

Family Support Organizations (FSO’s) are family-run, county-based organizations that provide direct family-to-family peer support, education, advocacy and other services to family members of children with emotional and behavioral problems. To access services, you may call these organizations directly or call **1-877- 652-7624**.

About Ramp, Renaud & Hlavenka

The East Brunswick, NJ, law firm of Ramp, Renaud & Hlavenka, LLC provides its clients with in-depth expertise across all its practice areas—the sort of knowledge that enables its lawyers to chart successful strategies and deliver winning outcomes. Making that proficiency even more powerful is the meticulous preparation that goes into every case. The firm's attorneys treat every client with kindness and compassion. They understand that when individuals reach out to a lawyer, they are seeking help with their most personal and pressing problems.

Please visit www.ramprenaud.com.

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