

**HUNTERDON COUNTY CHAPTER, NJ NAMI
INTENSIVE FAMILY SUPPORT SERVICES OF HUNTERDON
MEDICAL CENTER BEHAVIORAL HEALTH
FAMILY SUPPORT ORGANIZATION OF SOMERSET HUNTERDON WARREN
RAMP, RENAUD & HLAVENKA**

PRESS RELEASE

**MENTAL HEALTH ADVOCATE SPEECH ABOUT BUILDING
COMPASSION INTO THE JUSTICE SYSTEM RE-SCHEDULED FOR
APRIL 21**

Attorney will speak at joint session of agencies supporting those with mental illness

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE (FLEMINGTON, NJ, February 25, 2010) – Ann Renaud, an East Brunswick attorney and mental health advocate who is passionate about protecting the rights of those with mental health issues, will speak at a special program co-sponsored by the Hunterdon County Chapter of the National Alliance on Mental Illness (NAMI), the Intensive Family Support Services of Hunterdon Medical Center Behavioral Health and the Family Support Organization of Somerset Hunterdon and Warren on Weds., April 21, from 6:30 – 8:30 p.m. at Hunterdon Medical Center, 2100 Wescott Drive Flemington, NJ.

She will provide keynote comments at the session which is open to the public free of charge. The event had originally been scheduled for Feb. 9, but was canceled because of bad weather.

“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 create 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.”

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. She said 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.

“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,” she said in her blog on www.ramprenaud.com. “Failing to deal effectively with mental health issues only results in further suffering by the individual and harm to society.”

Ms. Renaud said fundamental changes are needed in the way our system metes justice for those with mental health issues, citing the words of Baltimore Judge Charlotte Cooksey: “Our jails have become de facto psychiatric hospitals. That must change.”

Renaud will talk about the rights of those with mental health and substance abuse issues at the joint meeting of Hunterdon NAMI, the Intensive Family Support Services and the Family Support Organization. She will explore ways individuals caught in the justice system can advocate for themselves and utilize available public and private resources.

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

About NAMI

NAMI New Jersey is a statewide non-profit organization dedicated to improving the lives of individuals and families who are affected by mental illness. The Hunterdon County Chapter of NAMI is located in Flemington.

About IFSS

The Intensive Family Support Services (IFSS) Program of Hunterdon Medical Center Behavioral Health offers a range of supportive activities designed to improve the quality of life for families with a mentally ill relative. Family members and professionals work collaboratively to provide each family with the knowledge, skills and supports they identify as useful to the family's overall functioning and sense of control. Services are available to any family, free of charge and regardless of whether or not the ill family member is receiving mental health services.

About FSO

The Family Support Organization of Hunterdon, Somerset and Warren Counties provides direct peer-to-peer support to the family members and caregivers of children with special emotional and behavioral needs. FSO helps children with complex emotional, mental health or behavioral issues

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; www.naminj.org and www.fso-hsw.org.

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