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LIFE (Living Independence for Everyone) and the Gulf Coast Fair Housing Center jointly celebrate the 10th Anniversary of landmark civil rights decision

June 22, 2009, marks the 10th Anniversary of the Olmstead decision. This Supreme Court decision ensures that people with disabilities retain the right to live in the community and receive needed support services in the community setting. This case addressed the bias towards institutionalization of people with disabilities in programs of the state and federal level "I cannot imagine having the ability to go where I want to go, eat what and when I want, and doing what I want to do stripped from me. I know this could easily happen to me, if I did not have my support system and had to be placed in a nursing home!" states Cindy Singletary, person with a disability. The Olmstead Decision sets forth requirements for states to report their progress towards a non-institutionalization based system. On June 22, 1999, people with disabilities gained a victory.

While there have been and continue to be many progressions for the rights and quality of life for people with disabilities, over-institutionalization and the lack of community-based services remain rampant throughout the country. 313,000 institutionalized persons with disabilities have stated that they want to live and receive needed support services in the community. This number does not include those, everyday, losing their ability to live in the community because they lack access to needed services. The Gulf Coast Fair Housing Center (GCFHC) works to ensure persons with disabilities have equal access to housing opportunities when renting or buying a home. This includes making sure persons with disabilities know their fair housing rights and our community is aware of the right of persons with disabilities to live independently.

The number of those with disabilities being institutionalized continues to grow, stripping more and more people with disabilities of their independence while costing the states more money than community-based services would. The community setting also provides the opportunity for people with disabilities to stimulate the local economy and even become employed. Community-based services are a win for everyone. Thankfully, there are local organizations trying to bridge that gap for people with disabilities in Mississippi. LIFE (Living Independence for Everyone) of Mississippi, a center for independent living, has a program, called Project LINC (Linking Individuals into Neighborhoods and Communities). Project LINC assists people with disabilities who have been improperly institutionalized or are at-risk of being institutionalized gain to access the limited resources needed to live in the community. To date, LIFE has assisted 101 people with disabilities in successfully transitioning from nursing homes into the community and has prevented numerous institutionalizations.

This Thursday, June 25, 2009, LIFE of Mississippi and GCFHC unite to present, "What are Reasonable Accommodations & Reasonable Modifications?" at 6:00-7:00 pm at the Donal Snyder Center, 2520 Pass Road, Biloxi MS 39531 Rm. 2. Door prizes and light refreshments will be served. To RSVP contact GCFHC at 228-396-4008 or admin@makeitfair.com. To learn more about the Olmstead decision or fair housing rights visit www.makeitfair.com.