

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
October 1, 2007

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**National Coalition of Special Needs Attorneys Marks Fifth Anniversary
By Restructuring as Non-profit Organization**

Move reaffirms 'mission of advocacy'

(TUCSON, Ariz.) --- In what its leadership has called a reaffirmation of its “roots in advocacy,” the Special Needs Alliance (SNA) has announced its reorganization as a non-profit organization. The announcement was made as the organization prepares to mark its fifth anniversary, at the SNA’s annual meeting later this month in Clearwater Beach, Florida.

Founded as a for-profit corporation in 2002 by a small group of disability and elder law attorneys serving the planning needs of individuals with special needs, the SNA now boasts a membership of more than 100 attorneys in 47 states. Membership in the SNA is by invitation only, and limited to attorneys who have proven experience in the areas of estate and trust planning for individuals with disabilities, disability law, and advocacy. The organization’s members have an average of 18 years of relevant legal experience, and a majority of SNA attorneys are also family members of individuals with disabilities.

“We believe that the spirit of advocacy should stand at the center of the legal profession,” says Edward Wilcenski, SNA board president and a special needs planning attorney in Clifton Park, New York. “This restructuring,” Wilcenski remarks, “is consistent with our continuing work as advocates for individuals with disabilities and their families who wrestle with the often overwhelming challenges of navigating the public benefit system and other disability planning issues.”

Wilcenski adds that the move to non-profit status is consistent with the SNA's philosophy, which is to use member dues for in house education for its members, and to support members who provide educational programs to the public and other professionals on the complex areas of special needs trusts and entitlement program eligibility. No SNA member derives any direct financial benefit from the SNA.

He also notes that its non-profit status encourages the SNA's active participation in the dialogue over federal disability programs and policy. "While our primary focus must always be on our clients when it comes to special needs planning," he said, "as attorneys with expertise in this area, we also have an obligation to advocate for change in the areas that impact individuals with disabilities and their families, such special education, housing, Medicare and Medicaid reform, financial entitlements, and mental health issues."

The SNA provides a range of services to families and professionals including helping families identify qualified attorneys in their communities, assisting family members with planning for the future when they are no longer able to provide care, and assisting other legal professionals in protecting public benefits eligibility for their clients with disabilities. Member attorneys in the SNA are skilled in such services as drafting special needs trusts and wills, advising trustees of special needs trusts, coordinating estate and financial planning, conservatorship, guardianship, and managing litigation proceeds and structured settlements.

For more information about the Special Needs Alliance, please visit www.specialneedsalliance.com, or call 877-572-8472.

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