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**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

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**VOTING & ADVOCACY EFFORTS FOCUS OF  
NATIONAL DEVELOPMENTAL DISABILITIES AWARENESS MONTH**

MONTGOMERY – Today marks the beginning of Developmental Disabilities Awareness Month. For more than 25 years, The Arc of the United States has sponsored this annual observance in order to enhance understanding of the issues affecting people with intellectual and other developmental disabilities, and educate the public that people with intellectual and other developmental disabilities can be vital and vibrant members of our communities.

Statewide efforts during the month-long observance include the Alabama Disabilities Advocacy Day slated to take place on March 8, 2012, in Montgomery. Hosted by the Alabama Disability Advocacy Network, people with disabilities, families, friends, and professionals are being asked to unite in Montgomery to make sure their voices are heard. The day will kick-off at 9:15 a.m. and include a rally, press conference, and meet & greet with the Alabama Legislature before concluding at 2:30 p.m.

Intellectual and developmental disabilities are conditions that affect more than 7 million Americans, and more than 121,000 Alabamians and their families. Developmental disabilities are severe chronic disabilities that can be cognitive or physical or both. The disabilities appear before the age of 22 and are likely to be lifelong. A smaller subset encompasses intellectual disabilities, which includes the “cognitive” part of this definition, that is, those disabilities that are broadly related to thought processes. Because intellectual and other developmental disabilities often co-occur, intellectual disability professionals often work with people who have both types of disabilities. Some developmental disabilities are purely physical, such as congenital deafness or visual impairment. These are not intellectual disabilities. Other developmental disabilities can be caused by cerebral palsy, epilepsy, autism or other conditions. These conditions might or might not include intellectual disabilities.

The Arc of the United States is the largest national volunteer-based membership organization, and The Arc of Alabama is the largest state volunteer-based membership organization working to include all people with intellectual and other developmental disabilities in every community. In this pivotal election year, The Arc and its state chapters are joining national efforts to raise awareness about disability-related policy on the campaign trail. In 2008, only 46 percent of people with ID/DD who were eligible to vote actually did so. The Arc of Alabama, and other state chapters nationwide, is working to improve voting rates in ID/DD community for 2012 and educate candidates about the issues that matter most to the ID/DD community.

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RESOURCES

Information about Developmental Disabilities Awareness Month and the “We’ve Got the Power” voting campaign, visit The Arc at <http://www.thearc.org/>.

More information about AL-DAN and/or the 2012 Alabama Disabilities Advocacy Day can be found at <http://www.aladan.org/>.

For more information about the Arc of Alabama, visit <http://www.thearcofAlabama.com/>.