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**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

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**STAKEHOLDERS & PUBLIC OFFICIALS TO JOIN GOVERNOR BENTLEY AT  
PROCLAMATION SIGNING HOUR FOR RICKY WYATT DAY IN ALABAMA**

MONTGOMERY – In remembrance of the significant role he played in the landmark *Wyatt v. Stickney* ruling and the historic transformation of the Alabama mental health system, Governor Bentley proclaimed March 12, 2012, Ricky Wyatt Day in Alabama. Sadly, Wyatt passed away on November 1, 2011. Representatives from ADMH felt the 41<sup>st</sup> anniversary of Judge Frank M. Johnson, Jr.'s landmark ruling establishing the right to minimum standards of care would be a fitting time to honor Wyatt.

Tomorrow, several mental health stakeholders and public officials will join Governor Bentley at the formal proclamation signing. Consumer advocate Jon Brock will escort Ricky's mother to the signing, where she will join ADMH Commissioner Zelia Baugh, ADMH Spokesman Tony Thompson, Senator Gerald Allen, Representative Chris England, George Wallace, Jr., ADMH Board Member Paul Davis, and James Tucker and Ellen Gillespie from the Alabama Disabilities Advocacy Program.

*Wyatt v. Stickney* was filed in October 1970 on behalf of Wyatt, then a resident at Bryce Hospital in Tuscaloosa. Wyatt courageously endured substandard conditions of habilitation and care that was indicative of the inhumane and overcrowded environment common in state institutions at that time. Eventually the case was granted class-action status and became nationally emblematic of the struggle for the civil rights of institutionalized persons.

Wyatt was misunderstood and ridiculed by many of his fellow residents at Bryce for his participation in the lawsuit. In his 1971 and 1972 rulings, Judge Johnson found that persons involuntarily committed to mental health institutions had a constitutional right to personalized treatment, including freedom from unwarranted seclusion and restraint, with adequate staff, in a safe and dignified environment. Wyatt's perseverance and the persistence of other parties in the class-action suit fostered many of the reforms that transformed the mental health system in Alabama and the nation over the 33-year duration of the lawsuit. Following his discharge from the hospital, Wyatt developed a career as a painter and lived independently in the community, thereby personifying the ultimate mission and purpose of mental health treatment.

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**RESOURCES**

*The Legacy of Wyatt*, a 17-minute documentary tracing the *Wyatt v. Stickney* case can be found by visiting ADMH's website at <http://www.mh.alabama.gov/video/LegacyOfWyatt.aspx>.