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## **New State Agency Titles for Groups Serving the Disabled**

JEFFERSON CITY — Just recently, Missouri joined the ranks of states that are removing the term “mental retardation” from state agency names by changing the name of the Division of Mental Retardation and Developmental Disabilities to the Division of Developmental Disabilities. During the past 18 months, five states, including Connecticut, Massachusetts, Pennsylvania, Virginia and West Virginia as well as the District of Columbia have made similar changes. Only six states — Alabama, Kentucky, Mississippi, New York, Ohio and Tennessee — have not yet removed the term.

Both nationally and statewide, advocates have actively called for the change as another appropriate step in reducing the stigma of having a developmental disability. Officials at the Missouri Department of Mental Health also point out that using the terms “mental retardation and developmental disabilities” can be redundant because mental retardation by definition is just one type of developmental disability. There are many other development disabilities, including cerebral palsy, epilepsy, Down Syndrome, Autism Spectrum Disorder, and brain injuries.

On the national scene, we’ve witnessed a steady progression of several organizations changing their language to eliminate the term “mental retardation” name from divisions, departments and committees — all in response to the widespread support of people with disabilities.

Back in 2003, the president renamed The President’s Committee on Mental Retardation to the President’s Committee for People with Intellectual Disabilities. The Special Olympics, which serves more than two million people who have been diagnosed with mental retardation, has also altered its language. The Arc of the United States, the oldest and largest parent support and advocacy group for people with developmental disabilities, removed the term from its name in 1992. The American Association of Intellectual and Development Disabilities, a 130-year-old association that represents developmental disabilities professionals worldwide, has also altered all former references to “mental retardation.”

Similarly in Missouri, the General Assembly this year changed the name of its State Schools for Severely Handicapped Children to the Missouri Schools for the Severely Disabled. The

popular opinion was that the new title is more closely aligned and representative of the schools' mission to provide an equitable and quality public education for every learner.

I'm proud of the work Missouri is doing to improve its mental health delivery system, including the General Assembly's recent decision to support legislation I successfully advanced to form the Missouri Commission on Autism Spectrum Disorders and to provide the best resources available in the diagnosis, treatment and support for Missouri families. These name changes are just one more way our state is demonstrating its support — and consideration — for Missourians living with developmental disabilities.

If you have comments or questions about this week's column or any other matter involving state government, please do not hesitate to contact me. You can reach my office by phone at (866) 271-2844.

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