

A Statement from the Alabama Department of Mental Health and Mental Retardation

May 16, 2008

The Alabama Department of Mental Health and Mental Retardation has recently discovered that a group of index cards from Greil Hospital in Montgomery, Alabama that contain a limited amount of patient information is missing. Although the cards do not record health information, they contain personal information such as the person's name, social security number and date of birth. The department's Bureau of Special Investigations has launched an investigation regarding the matter and affected individuals are being directly notified. In a letter sent to these individuals the department encourages them to monitor their personal finance and credit information carefully and to notify the department of any irregular or suspicious activity. Commissioner John Houston of the Alabama DMH/MR said, "If these items were stolen, this behavior was not only in violation of our policies but Federal law as well. We have zero tolerance for violation of these policies and if criminal activity has occurred we will pursue prosecution vigorously. We apologize for any anxiety this may cause to patients or their family members."

The department is working to help ensure that affected individuals are aware of the situation and of the steps they may take to protect themselves from misuse of their personal information. To every extent possible, individual notification letters will be sent to the affected individuals. Information will also be available on the department's website, www.mh.alabama.gov. Additionally, the department has set up a call center that individuals may use to get information about this situation and learn more about consumer identity protections. The toll free number is 1-866-577-7299. The call center will be open beginning Monday, May 19, 2008, and will operate from 8 am to 8:00 pm Monday-Friday as long as it is needed. Consumers who are deaf or hard of hearing may call the 800 number by either Alabama Relay (711) or video relay and leave a call back number for a direct callback by the means of your choice.

The department has been proactive in staff training and consumer training regarding potential identity theft. The Office of Consumer Rights and Advocacy Protection conducted trainings on 'Identity Theft' prevention as recently as last month at the annual consumer Recovery Conference. More than 900 people with mental illnesses attended the conference and had the opportunity to receive the training. "We take issues surrounding the rights and privacy of the people we serve very seriously," said Commissioner Houston. "So far there is no indication that illegal activity has occurred through the use of personal information contained on the missing group of cards. The department will continue the investigation and is reviewing internal procedures to assure every possible measure is in place to prevent any unauthorized disclosures of personal information."

###