



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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**ORANGE GROVE CENTER HABILITATION CENTER DIRECTOR DR. RICK RADER
TESTIFIES IN CONGRESS ON BEHALF OF PEOPLE WITH DISABILITIES**

Chattanooga, TN – Recently, Orange Grove Center’s Director of the Morton J. Kent Habilitation Center, Dr. Rick Rader, testified in the United States Congress on behalf of improving the healthcare outcomes for people with intellectual and developmental disabilities (IDD). Rader, along with other national healthcare advocates, was invited to Washington D.C. to promote the Healthcare Extension and Accessibility for Developmental Disabled and Understood Population Act, often abbreviated as the HEADs UP Act.

The act, proposed by House Representatives Seth Moulton (D-MA), Brian Fitzpatrick (R-PA), Debbie Dingell (D-MI) and Joe Morelle (D-NY), would help to rectify health inequities faced by people with disabilities – such as higher rates of conditions such as gingivitis, diabetes, arthritis, and asthma, higher rates of undiagnosed hearing and vision impairments, and lower likelihood of receiving preventative health screenings and vaccinations – by opening up dozens of federal programs to people with IDD. These would include the ability to apply for federal funding to expand and develop new Community Health Centers with a focus on people with IDD, access to medical school tuition aid programs for medical providers specializing in people with IDD, eligibility for J-1 visa waivers for medical students in order to supplement an ongoing shortage of primary care physicians specializing in people with IDD, and grants for continuing education for medical providers.

The HEADs UP Act would be able to accomplish its goals by designating people with IDD as a Medically Underserved Population (MUP). The Federal Government defines a MUP as “a population living in a specific geographic area that lacks access to primary care services and experiences poverty and infant mortality at high rates”. The HEADs UP Act, citing the inequities currently faced by people with IDD, holds that people with IDD in the United States meet all of the criteria of a MUP besides the specific geographic area requirement, which necessitates government aid in order to help circumvent the reality that people with IDD in the U.S. experience poorer health outcomes and shorter life expectancies when compared to people without disabilities.

Rader, a self-described medical futurist, began his work at Orange Grove Center in 1994. Orange Grove recently celebrated its 70th anniversary in 2023, and the Morton J. Kent Habilitation Center, of which Rader is the Director, is currently celebrating its 30th anniversary. According to Rader, the Habilitation Center was created “to identify, create and promote the emerging best practices in providing comprehensive and collaborative healthcare to people with disabilities across the lifespan. [The Habilitation Center] mentors medical and dental students from around the world and contributes to teaching, advocacy, and research in areas such as aging, dementia, self-determination and community inclusion.”

Rader is cross trained in internal medicine and medical anthropology, and is board-certified in adult developmental medicine. He has received two Presidential appointments to the President's Committee for People with Intellectual Disabilities and to the National Council on Disability, where he co-authored the seminal "Health Equity Framework Report". He has also been a consultant to four U.S. Surgeon Generals on health and disability. He is the President of the American Association on Health and Disability and a founding president of the American Academy of Developmental Medicine and Dentistry. He has published over 300 articles in the area of developmental disabilities.

About Orange Grove Center

Founded in 1953, Orange Grove Center is a private, non-profit organization that serves 1,000+ adults and children with intellectual and developmental disabilities (IDD) in the Chattanooga and North Georgia areas. For more information about programs and services, visit <https://www.orangegrovecenter.org/>. For weekly updates, follow @orangegrovecr on Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, and LinkedIn.

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