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**Governor's Commission on Disabilities Releases New
Recommendations
to Increase Access to Persons with Disabilities**

~ Celebrates 19th anniversary of federal Americans with Disabilities Act ~

TALLAHASSEE – In honor of the 19th anniversary of the federal Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) on Sunday, July 26, 2009, Governor Charlie Crist today accepted the 2009 recommendations of the Governor's Commission on Disabilities, developed after two years of information gathering and public meetings held in Jacksonville, Orlando, Tampa, Miami and Tallahassee. Established by Governor Crist in July 2007, the commission represents all Floridians with disabilities, including persons with developmental disabilities, mental illness, brain and spinal cord injuries, and visual and hearing impairments, as well as senior citizens and veterans with disabilities.

"I applaud the commissioners for their commitment to evaluating the needs of Floridians with disabilities and exploring ways we can remove barriers to independence," Governor Crist said. "The commission's willingness to incorporate suggestions from Floridians will help us improve the quality of life for persons with disabilities, their families and our communities."

This year the commission presented 18 recommendations that build on last year's 49 recommendations. As directed by the Governor in 2008, the commission expanded its scope to include health care, focusing on exploring methods of early detection and intervention of all disabling conditions. The commission also continued its focus on employment, education, independent living, transportation and civil

rights for persons with disabilities, acknowledging that some of the recommendations are far-reaching and will require legislation and time to implement.

“Governor Crist has strived to make Florida a national leader in improving the rights and participation in community life for persons with disabilities,” said Lance Block, chairman of the commission. “The recommendations in our report will help the Governor further open doors to independence for all Floridians.”

Commission’s Accomplishments

During the past year, the commission has worked to develop the Florida College Transition Program, a structured college transition program that offers a solution to the underemployment of Floridians with disabilities by providing individualized transition services to high school students between ages 14 and 22. They are also seeking to incorporate onto the state identification cards or driver licenses proof of eligibility for ADA/transportation-disadvantaged services by working with the Florida Public Transportation Association and the Florida Department of Highway Safety and Motor Vehicles. In addition, the commission has made the following progress toward implementing their 2008 recommendations, which include the following initiatives:

Education

- *Increase American Sign Language (ASL) classes in public school* – Conduct public awareness campaign in October 2009.

Employment

- *Comprehensive clearinghouse Web site* – Developing a state-of-the-art, stand-alone Web site with a grant from the Able Trust.
- *Employment and career awareness campaign* – Partnering with the Able Trust to develop an awareness campaign.
- *Encourage employer participation in Business Leadership Networks* – Promoting businesses through the commission’s list-serve.

Independent Living

- ***Affordable and accessible housing*** – Planning for an independent living section of proposed clearinghouse Web site.
- ***Statewide special needs shelter registry*** – Partnering with local law enforcement agencies to expand the “Take Me Home” Program statewide. The “Take Me Home” Program is an interactive, searchable database to assist in the identification and timely return of persons with disabilities and the elderly who wander away from their caregivers during times of emergency or disaster. Although initially designed for children with autism, the program expanded to serve as a safeguard for persons with disabilities of all ages and their parents or caregivers. Both law enforcement officers and families use the database to identify missing persons with disabilities and safely return them to their families in a prompt manner. Since its inception, the registry software has been provided free of charge by the Pensacola Police Department and the Autism Society of America to all law enforcement agencies.

Transportation

- ***Consumer-directed transportation voucher program*** – Contracting with the University of South Florida to study the need for a voucher program and recommend implementation strategies.

Summary of 2009 Recommendations

The commission’s new recommendations include the following:

- ***Increased Accessibility*** – Provide accessibility during initial construction, which is less expensive than modifying a home after conventional construction. The commission recommends amending the state building code to provide inclusive design modifications and providing a tax credit to encourage accessible construction and standards.
- ***Protections for Persons with Disabilities*** – Develop training for first responders, public safety personnel and health care professionals regarding appropriate interactions with persons with disabilities.
- ***Support for Returning Veterans*** – Develop appropriate behavioral health care services and effective systems of referral for returning veterans with traumatic

brain injury or behavioral health needs.

- ***Health Care***

- Change focus of behavioral health treatment from alleviation of symptoms, to treatment addressing the underlying traumatic event that triggered mental illness.
- Expand partnerships between state agencies to increase collaboration and improve customer service.
- Identify barriers preventing senior adults and persons with disabilities from living in home and community settings rather than nursing homes.
- Work to increase health plan coverage options for persons with disabilities.
- Modify Medicaid regulations to increase number of providers willing to accept Medicaid and remove barriers to persons with disabilities accepting employment.
- Work to increase dental services to at-risk populations, including persons with disabilities.

About the Governor's Commission on Disabilities

On July 26, 2007, the 17th anniversary of the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA), Governor Crist signed Executive Order 07-148, creating the commission. He charged the commission with advancing public policy for Floridians with disabilities and providing a forum for advocates representing the disabilities community to develop and voice unified concerns and recommendations for improvements. Governor Crist extended the Commission's tenure with Executive Order 08-193 and broadened its mission to include health care.

Later, Executive Order 07-244 finalized the membership of the 21-member commission. Representatives include individuals with hearing impairments, visual impairments, developmental disabilities, spinal cord or brain injuries and mental illnesses, as well as elderly individuals and disabled veterans and the executive director of the Statewide Advocacy Council. In addition, the following organizations are represented: Centers for Independent Living, the Division of Vocational Rehabilitation, the Florida Division of Blind Services, the

Florida Department of Health, the Florida Department of Education, the Florida Department of Children and Families, the Florida Agency for Health Care Administration, the Florida Agency for Persons with Disabilities, the Florida Department of Elder Affairs, the Florida Department of Veterans Affairs, the Florida Agency for Workforce Administration, the Florida Commission for the Transportation Disadvantaged and the Florida Division of Emergency Management.

For more information regarding the Governor's Commission on Disabilities, or to access the full report, please visit http://dms.myflorida.com/other_programs/governor_s_commission_on_disabilities.

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AMERICANS WITH DISABILITIES ACT DAY

WHEREAS, the Americans with Disabilities Act was signed into law on July 26, 1990, to provide a comprehensive mandate for the elimination of discrimination against qualified individuals with disabilities in access to employment, transportation, telecommunications, state and local services, and public accommodations; and

WHEREAS, on July 26, 1992, the final major provisions of the ADA became effective; and

WHEREAS, more than three million Floridians, roughly one-fifth of our state's population, live daily with some form of physical or mental disability; and

WHEREAS, the State of Florida affirms the principals of equality and inclusion for persons with disabilities as set forth in the State of Florida's Constitution, Article I, Section 11 and is embodied in the

ADA and laws of the State of Florida; and

WHEREAS, numerous organizations and advocates throughout Florida work with constituents and the community to bring forth the promises of hope and freedom that were envisioned by the passage of the ADA; and

WHEREAS, July 26, 2009, celebrates the 19th Anniversary of the Americans with Disabilities Act;

NOW, THEREFORE, I, Charlie Crist, Governor of the State of Florida, do hereby extend greetings and best wishes to all observing July 26, 2009, as Americans With Disabilities Act Day.

IN WITNESS
WHEREOF, I have
hereunto set my hand
and caused the Great
Seal of the State of
Florida to be affixed at
Tallahassee, the
Capitol, this 26th day
of June, in the year
two thousand nine

Charlie Crist
Governor

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