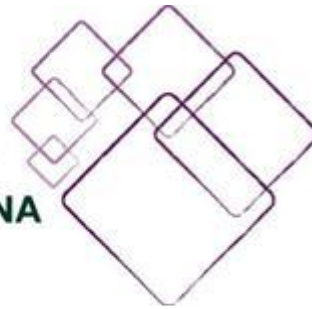


# **DISABILITY RIGHTS** NORTH CAROLINA

Champions for Equality and Justice



## **FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

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**Friday, August 22, 2008**

## **Patients at Cherry Deserve More from the State**

### **Raleigh, NC-**

In April 2008, Steven H. Sabock was admitted to Cherry Hospital for psychiatric treatment. Days later he died after sitting in a chair for more than 22 hours without food or aid from the Hospital staff.

State law requires that deaths resulting from accidents, including unexpected, unnatural or irregular events, be reported to the state's federally mandated protection and advocacy system. According to 122C – 31, Disability Rights NC should have been promptly notified of this death. Disability Rights NC requested records after first hearing of this death on Monday August 18. Our preliminary investigation reveals that Cherry staff conspired to cover up the events that led to Mr. Sabock's death by falsifying records.

“The circumstance surrounding Mr. Sabock's death confirm there is a culture at Cherry Hospital which tolerates a disregard for the individuals in its care”, according to Vicki Smith, Executive Director of Disability Rights NC. “Aggressive action must be taken by the Department of Health and Human Services.”

In a recent statement, DHHS Secretary Dempsey Benton stated, “ [d]isciplinary actions have been take to emphasize that attentive, quality care is an essential responsibility for every employee.”

“Disability Rights NC has raised its concern with DHHS about this egregious situation. We will be carefully monitoring patient care at Cherry,” Smith said. “People with mental illness and their families need to be safe while in the State’s care. DHHS must demonstrate that they understand their responsibility to ensure a safe, humane and therapeutic environment at all of the facilities providing services for people with disabilities including mental illness.”

# # #

One of the P&A’s primary federal mandates is to protect and advocate against the abuse and neglect of people with disabilities in the care of state institutions.