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IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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Medical Office Sued for Barring Access for Patient with Service Animal

Nashville, Tennessee – Lorre Leon Mendelson filed suit in federal court today against Women’s Medical Associates of Nashville, P.C. alleging the medical office discriminated against her on the basis of disability in violation of federal law when it forced her to leave its premises because she was accompanied by her service animal. As a result, Mendelson was unable to access needed medical care.

Mendelson’s service animal, Sunshine, is a Goldendoodle. For the past 13 years, Sunshine has helped Mendelson manage symptoms of her posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD) and obsessive compulsive disorder (OCD). Sunshine routinely accompanies Mendelson to places of public accommodation including businesses and medical offices. Sunshine is trained to recognize Mendelson’s symptoms, alert her to them, and initiate interaction with her in order to interrupt the symptoms.

Two federal laws, the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) and Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act, make clear that businesses that are open to the public must allow people with disabilities to be accompanied by their service animals. Service animals are not required to be licensed or registered as service animals. In addition, their users are not required to provide documentation that the animal is a service animal.

In December 2017, Mendelson arrived with Sunshine for a scheduled medical appointment. Women’s Medical Associates of Nashville, P.C. repeatedly questioned Mendelson about whether Sunshine is a “registered service animal.” Mendelson attempted to educate the office about service animals, even suggesting they look online at guidance from the Department of Justice (available at https://www.ada.gov/service_animals_2010.htm). Instead of doing so, the office’s Administrator stated that dogs, including service dogs, are not allowed in the office, told Mendelson she would have to leave, and had security escort her from the premises.

As a result of this medical office’s discrimination against her, Mendelson was unable to obtain the medical care she needed. Mendelson said, “I have spent much of my life educating people about the benefits of and laws pertaining to service dogs. It broke my heart to have been escorted out of a doctor’s office by security because of my disability.”

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Stein & Vargas, LLP is a civil rights firm based in Washington, D.C. and committed to the principle that all people have full and equal access to all parts of society.

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