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DISABILITIES ACTIVISTS LAUNCH CAMPAIGN FOR RESPECT
Self-advocates Condemn Depiction of People with Disabilities in “Tropic Thunder”

Washington, DC – A group of self-advocates, disability rights activists and families of people with disabilities joined to denounce the portrayal of people with intellectual disabilities in the film “Tropic Thunder” which opens nationwide today. The film, which has sparked boycotts and demonstrations across the country, features a character named “Simple Jack,” a person with an intellectual disability. In the film, the character is repeatedly referred to as a “retard,” “moron,” and “imbecile.”

“These are words and images that get in the way of my right to live with dignity in the community,” said Jill Egle, Co-Executive Director of The Arc of Northern VA and a self-advocate. “The message of this movie is that it is acceptable to make fun of people like me,” Egle added.

Peter V. Berns, Executive Director of The Arc of the United States led a coalition of national disability advocates in a meeting with executives at DreamWorks SKG in Los Angeles last week. The Arc was joined in the meeting by Special Olympics, the National Down Syndrome Congress, the American Association of People with Disabilities and other groups which presented options to the studio, including amending the film before release and producing a national educational campaign.

“The national outcry over this kind of hate speech for the past several days is proof that disabilities are the last battleground in our collective struggle to achieve civil rights for all. The mobilizing efforts of people with intellectual disabilities and the show of solidarity from national organizations around this issue of dignity and respect for people with disabilities are unprecedented,” Berns said.

The more than 780 chapters of The Arc across the United States will have a presence at local movie theaters screening the movie throughout the opening weekend. Organizers and advocates will be distributing flyers on the R-word and hate speech along with other educational materials.

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