



**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

Contact: Deborah Sams (202) 293-3703 ext 100 or [dsams@firststar.org](mailto:dsams@firststar.org)  
Sherry Quirk (202) 775-6814 or [squirk@sandw.com](mailto:squirk@sandw.com)

**First Star Champions the Rights of North Carolina Foster Youth**

WASHINGTON, D.C. (June 8, 2006) — First Star ([www.firststar.org](http://www.firststar.org)) announced today a legal project in collaboration with Sullivan & Worcester LLP to champion the rights of fifteen year-old foster youth, John G. First Star and Sullivan & Worcester are seeking leave to file an *amicus curiae* brief in the North Carolina Court of Appeals requesting that the Court order the Guilford County Department of Social Services (DSS) to apply John's social security payments to his monthly mortgage and to the costs of repairs on a house that John inherited.

After over a decade of neglect and mistreatment at the hands of abusive guardians, fifteen year-old John finds a measure of stability in the form of Social Security survivor benefits and a small house left to him by his late father. Unfortunately, John's current needs and the fate of his home are being threatened by Guilford County's DSS. In selecting itself as John's representative payee, DSS retains control over John's social security benefits. But, rather than make monthly mortgage payments and repairs to the home with John's social security benefits, DSS has chosen instead to let the house hover near foreclosure by redirecting John's money into its own accounts.

In December 2005, the District Court ordered DSS to make the monthly mortgage payments to save John's house. DSS, however, continues to resist using John's money to help John keep his house, and has now appealed the District Court's decision to the North Carolina Court of Appeals.

Given its unusual circumstances, John's case has come to characterize the ongoing clash between children's advocates and state welfare agencies across the country regarding the proper use of over \$100 million in social security benefits for foster children with deceased or disabled parents.

First Star recognizes the widespread negative ramifications of a decision in favor of DSS. A decision overturning the District Court's order would be a frightening blow to John's future in that it would squander the only asset of a boy who will age out of foster care in less than two years with nothing but the clothes on his back. In addition, it would promote nationwide the horrific message that it is permissible and, indeed, acceptable, for state welfare agencies to require foster children to pay for the cost of their own foster care. Because of this, First Star is seeking to file this brief to facilitate the Court's understanding of the broad legal effects of its decision and how that decision affects the most vulnerable of America's children.

*Amicus curiae* briefs are submitted to the Court by independent persons or entities that don't have any personal gain in the case at hand, but believe that the effects of the Court's decision in a particular case may have far reaching consequences. "*Amicus curiae*" is a Latin phrase, literally translated as "friend of the court."

### **About First Star**

First Star is a 501(c)(3) public charity dedicated to improving life for America's abused and neglected children. First Star's mission is to serve as a catalyst for meaningful reform of the child welfare system through communication, education and legislation. First Star works to change the child welfare system from one of abuse and neglect to one of protection and support through a collaborative, nonpartisan and multidisciplinary approach that fosters collaborative action among organizations, advocates, practitioners and policy-makers working to benefit children. For more information log on to [www.firststar.org](http://www.firststar.org).

### **About Sullivan & Worcester LLP**

Sullivan & Worcester LLP is a leading corporate law firm with approximately 200 attorneys in Boston, New York and Washington, D.C., nationally recognized for, among other things, its representation of REITs and its deep expertise in energy and mutual fund law. The firm's

domestic and international clients range from Fortune 500 companies to emerging businesses and not-for-profit organizations. Service to the community is highly valued at Sullivan & Worcester. Members of the firm provide pro bono or reduced-fee legal services, volunteer support, and financial donations to numerous public interest organizations and charitable causes such as educational and cultural institutions; housing and environmental initiatives; civil rights agencies; and organizations against domestic violence and child abuse. The firm also offers services in a wide range of areas including mergers and acquisitions; private equity; litigation; tax; venture capital; intellectual property; financings; securities; bankruptcy; real estate; regulatory law; and employment and benefits. For more information, please visit [www.sandw.com](http://www.sandw.com).