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## **Pennsylvania Resolution Aims to Increase Celiac Disease Awareness Statewide**

### *PA Legislature proclaims April 'Celiac Disease Awareness Month'*

**Ambler, Pennsylvania (April 1<sup>st</sup>, 2009)** – Legislation passed by the Pennsylvania House of Representatives General Assembly recognizes April 2009 as the state's official 'Celiac Disease Awareness Month'. With the passing of House Resolution 153 (HR 153), Pennsylvania takes the lead in raising awareness for celiac disease as the most common and most undiagnosed autoimmune disorder in the United States.

HR 153 was ratified unanimously, 196-0, on March 31<sup>st</sup>, 2009 with the assistance of its prime sponsor, state representative Craig A. Dally (R).

Geoffrey M. Roche, advocacy chairman for the National Foundation for Celiac Awareness (NFCA) and resident of Bethlehem, PA, collaborated extensively with representative Dally on the creation and development of HR153, and lobbied for its passage in the State House of Representatives.

"I would like to thank my State Representative, Craig Dally, and the entire State House for recognizing the impact this disease has on many Pennsylvanians and for assisting the National Foundation for Celiac Awareness in creating awareness that will ensure individuals with celiac get diagnosed, and correctly manage the disease." says Roche. "I understand first hand the impact this disease has on one's life and the need for education and awareness across our entire nation."

The entire resolution in its entirety can be read on the National Foundation for Celiac Awareness website, [www.celiaccentral.org](http://www.celiaccentral.org).

Roche's role in the successful sanctioning of HR153 and his passionate efforts on behalf of NFCA, stem from his personal experience with celiac disease, having been diagnosed with the autoimmune disorder just 11 months ago.

NFCA founder and president Alice Bast describes HR153 as, "The first step in reforming the US health care system in relation to autoimmune diseases, preventive care and chronic disease management."

NFCA and Roche aim to pass similar resolutions in every state nationwide, providing assistance and resources for citizens working on legislative efforts for the purpose of spreading awareness of celiac disease, a disease which current estimates suggest affect 1 in every 133 Americans. Only 120,000 of individuals with the autoimmune digestive disorder, roughly 1 in every 4700, have been diagnosed.

"Early assessment of celiac is crucial in preventing the onset of complications such as other autoimmune disorders, serious illnesses, and some cancers for individuals with this disease." says Bast.

Those interested in enacting legislation in their states should contact the NFCA at [info@celiaccentral.org](mailto:info@celiaccentral.org), by phone (215) 325-1306 ext.101, or visit the 'Get Involved' section on the NFCA website, [www.celiaccentral.org](http://www.celiaccentral.org) for information.

Celiac disease is an autoimmune digestive disease that damages the small intestine and interferes with absorption of nutrients from food. It is triggered by consumption of the protein called gluten, which is found in wheat, barley and rye. Left untreated, people with celiac disease can develop further complications such as other autoimmune diseases, osteoporosis, thyroid disease, and some cancers. An estimated three million Americans have celiac disease, but only about 1 in every 4700 with the disease receives an accurate diagnosis. Currently, the only treatment is a lifelong gluten-free diet.

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NFCA is a 501(c)(3) non-profit organization dedicated to raising awareness and funding for celiac disease that will advance research, education and screening amongst medical professionals, children and adults. Visit [www.celiaccentral.org](http://www.celiaccentral.org) or call 215-325-1306 for further information.