



2616 N. Broad Street
Colmar, PA 18915

215.997.9400 • 800.545.3286
Fax: 215.997.9403
info@firstskinfoundation.org
www.firstskinfoundation.org

MEDIA STATEMENT

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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Moureen Wenik, Executive Director for Foundation for Ichthyosis & Related Skin Types (FIRST) Responds to American Airlines' Discrimination of Passengers

COLMAR, Pa. (March 3, 2019) - On Feb. 28, American Airlines removed a passenger, Jordan Flake, and her young son from a flight from El Paso to Dallas due to their rare genetic skin disorder called ichthyosis because she was unable to produce medical documentation regarding the non-contagious disorder. The passengers were visiting their husband and father, an Army National Guard E4 Specialist stationed in El Paso. Ironically, this incident happened on Rare Disease Day, a global day to raise awareness amongst the general public and decision makers about rare diseases and their impact on patients' lives.

Appearance discrimination incidents such as this are very disconcerting. FIRST and its advocates work tirelessly to help families and individuals like Ms. Flake live a life free from prejudice, ridicule and discrimination. This incident on the American Airlines flight shows that more awareness and sensitivity training must be conducted and we welcome the opportunity to work with the American Airlines.

Educating employees and crew members on the emotional implications of discriminating against a person with a rare condition such as ichthyosis and recognizing it is non-communicable can help to eliminate subjecting future passengers to humiliating circumstances such as what Ms. Flake and her son encountered.

It is our sincere hope that this situation will be resolved in the most upstanding way and that future passengers with visible differences will be treated with the same dignity and rights as other passengers.

There are more than 30 types of ichthyosis, which are characterized by dry, cracked, scaling skin which may be thickened or very thin. There is no current cure for ichthyosis and the skin disorder is neither contagious, nor causes any threat to the public. FIRST works with individuals and families through support, education and research. More information about FIRST and ichthyosis can be found at www.firstskinfoundation.org.

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Contact: Moureen Wenik
215-997-9400 or cell 267-664-3131
mwenik@firstskinfoundation.org