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## Support Groups for Mentally Ill Sue M.T.A. Over Half-Fare Cards

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Three advocacy groups for the mentally ill have filed a class-action lawsuit against the Metropolitan Transportation Authority, saying its application process for half-fare MetroCards is too difficult and invasive for about 37,000 mentally ill riders who are eligible for the discount.

The suit, which was filed in Federal District Court in Brooklyn on May 22, says the application process requires the mentally disabled to provide doctor's certifications of their illness, which can be hard to obtain, and to make their full medical records available to the M.T.A.

Katharine Clemens, a lawyer for the Mental Health Law Project of MFY Legal Services Inc., one of the firms representing the three plaintiffs, said yesterday, "Because of the stigma attached to psychiatric disorders, people don't want to make those records public."

The plaintiffs are Community Access, Fountain House and the National Alliance for the Mentally Ill of New York City.

About 5,500 riders with serious mental illnesses have received the half-fare rates since 2000, Ms. Clemens said.

Transit officials declined to discuss the case yesterday because it is in litigation, but they said it was important to verify an applicant's medical condition carefully.

Advocates for the mentally ill say the problem has become more acute since the subway fare rose to \$2 this month. Most of the city's 37,000 mentally ill residents who are eligible for the discount live on fixed incomes and use public transportation to get to doctors' offices and service agencies, the advocates said.

Lawyers for the plaintiffs are also seeking an order requiring the M.T.A. to provide a simplified application process while the case goes through the courts. The judge is expected to issue a decision on June 24.