

ABOUT THE 2012 PENNSYLVANIA LEGAL AID NETWORK EXCELLENCE AWARD HONOREES

Mary K. Austin, Esq. is Associate Counsel to the University of Pittsburgh Medical Center Health System of Pittsburgh and has provided legal services to the low income community since she was a legal intern in Pennsylvania prior to graduating from the University of Michigan Law School. She was instrumental in the development of an innovative medical-legal collaboration between Neighborhood Legal Services Association and the University of Pittsburgh Medical Center. Ms. Austin serves on the NLSA Board of Directors and she has represented dozens of Protection from Abuse clients referred to her by NLSA. Ms. Austin is described as being the definition of “excellence” in her dedication and commitment as a volunteer attorney.

Carolyn L. Carter, Esq., is the Deputy Director of Advocacy for the National Consumer Law Center and has the well-deserved reputation as one of the leading consumer advocates in the United States. She has been a tireless advocate for low-income people all over the country, but especially in Pennsylvania, where she has practiced for many years before assuming her current position. Ms. Carter is the author or co-author of many consumer law publications, including the widely recognized book *Pennsylvania Consumer Law*, for which she wrote two chapters and was the editor-in-chief. The resulting book is the only one of its kind in the state and is invaluable to all consumer advocates. Will Ogburn, executive director of NCLC said, “Everybody here at the Center – everybody – thinks the world of Carolyn. She is terrific. . . . a colleague of unsurpassed near-perfection.”

Francesca Chervenak, Esq. is the Managing Attorney of the Pittsburgh office of the Pennsylvania Health Law Project. Ms. Chervenak spent her entire career as a legal services attorney, beginning with her first job at the Legal Aid Society of Minneapolis, where she distinguished herself while working with seniors and public benefits clients and supervising scores of lawyers, paralegals and law students. Returning to Pennsylvania and joining PHLP in 1998, she established a culture in Pittsburgh that is the envy of many offices. Staff in the Pittsburgh office say, “Fran’s ability to teach and continually mentor staff is unmatched; . . . her dedication to our clients and client community is unwavering.” Ms. Chervenak is especially valued for her competence in advising the DPW Consumer Subcommittee of the Pennsylvania Medical Assistance Advisory Committee (MAAC) for many years. Combined with her direct service, it is no exaggeration to say that she has helped thousands of Pennsylvanians.

Wayne Jacobs is the co-founder, executive director and driving force of X-Offenders for Community Empowerment (XCE), a North Philadelphia based organization which works to remove legal barriers faced by formerly convicted individuals in employment, housing, education, public benefits, and other areas. He has had the vision and determination to focus on an often overlooked group, those who have completed probation and parole and have older criminal records and who do not qualify for assistance from the Mayor’s Office of Re-integration Services for Ex-Offenders. An ex-offender himself, Mr. Jacobs

has been relentless in advocating for legislative changes that would help eliminate barriers in employment, specifically Philadelphia's "Ban the Box" ordinance which eliminates questions about criminal records from initial job application forms.

Minta Livengood is a client representative serving on the Board of Directors of Laurel Legal Services and is the President-Elect of that organization. She has worked with low-income clients in the Indiana County Community Action Program and through the Indiana County Welfare Rights Organization. She continues to assist low-income clients with public benefits issues. Ms. Livengood serves on the Pennsylvania Medical Assistance subcommittee of the Pennsylvania Department of Public Welfare and has also served on the Indiana and Armstrong Residential Services Board, a program for the behavioral health disabled. In addition to her board and committee responsibilities, Ms. Livengood is a tireless volunteer and an advocate for the rights of low-income residents of Pennsylvania as they relate to medical care, food stamps, energy assistance and other benefits. She is a valuable client leader in the legal aid community.

Suzanne Noble, Esq., is a staff attorney for Legal Aid of Southeastern Pennsylvania and has provided legal assistance for 37 years to low income families and victims of domestic abuse in Delaware County. She has been a pioneer in Pennsylvania relative to the Protection from Abuse Act which was passed in 1976. Ms. Noble set up procedures for handling cases; training staff at the local shelter, and helping victims of domestic abuse file petitions for protective orders. She continued this valuable work and in 2005, the Family Law Division of the Delaware Bar Association honored her with the Eric Turner Award for her contributions in family law. Ms. Noble evolved into a great teacher and mentor of law students enrolled in Villanova Law School's legal aid clinical program and has successfully exposed a whole new generation of lawyers to public service.

Robert A. Oakley, Esq. is the executive director of Northwestern Legal Services. For nearly 35 years, Mr. Oakley has devoted his professional life to the mission of legal aid, serving low-income people in Ohio, Wyoming and in Pennsylvania. Throughout his legal aid career, he has fostered partnerships with the private bar and the judiciary to expand services to the low-income community through pro bono representation and counsel of poverty-level clients. Once Mr. Oakley accepted his current position at NWLS, he began work on creating a centralized intake unit that evolved into a model for legal organizations across the nation. The creation in 1996 of this unit has resulted in a significant increase in the number of clients served. In addition to his work with the Legal Aid Volunteer Attorney (LAVA) Program, Mr. Oakley has invested his time and talents in assisting the JFK Center in Erie, a neighborhood organization providing a wide variety of essential services to inner-city residents.

Irwin L. Trauss, Esq., is supervising attorney of the Consumer Housing Unit of Philadelphia Legal Assistance. For 34 years, Mr. Trauss has practiced Consumer, Housing and Bankruptcy law on behalf of low-income Philadelphians. He takes cases other attorneys think are hopeless, and by tenaciously pursuing his clients' interests and thoroughly arguing every legal angle, he often wins those hopeless cases and sometimes makes new law. He has presented at continuing education conferences on bankruptcy or

mortgage foreclosure issues for various organizations and has testified before Congress, the TARP Oversight Board and Philadelphia City Council on a variety of issues. Mr. Trauss continues to work to build new connections among organizations to respond to client needs for access to justice. Additionally, as a long-time resident of Germantown, he has worked since 1991 as a Partner of Friends of the Fairfax to rehabilitate apartment buildings that had been taken over by drug dealers and transform them into safe residences for ethnically and economically diverse groups of tenants.

Pamela Walz, Esq. is a supervising attorney for Community Legal Services and is the co-head of the CLS Aging and Disabilities Unit. A Harvard graduate, Ms. Walz has spent her entire career at CLS, working on issues affecting frail and vulnerable seniors, including access to health care and public benefits issues. She has represented approximately 2,400 clients in individual cases, as well as thousands of individuals in class actions. She has always been ready to go above and beyond to assist her clients, combining extraordinary tenacity with kindness and gentle caring. She is a passionate and persistent advocate, always maintaining her gentle but powerful composure, even in the heat of an advocacy battle. Ms. Walz is also a commentary author for Philly.com providing insight on many topical issues affecting vulnerable and low income individuals in Pennsylvania.

Laurie Yurejefcic is a paralegal in the Lebanon office of MidPenn Legal Services. She is in Court every week, helping advocate for clients seeking protection from abuse orders, and has the respect of both the court and the attorneys with whom she comes in contact. Ms. Yurejefcic has frequent interactions with the private attorneys that she solicits them to take pro bono cases and she provides the oversight of the Lebanon County Bar Association Pro Bono program. Because of her diligence, Lebanon County has some of the best Pro Bono participation in the MidPenn region, if not in the state, at nearly 100%. Ms. Yurejefcic was recognized by the Lebanon County Commission for Women for her efforts with MidPenn on March 10, 2010, when she was inducted into the Lebanon County Women's Hall of Fame – Women Working for Justice.