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Massachusetts Bar Association to present Access to Justice Awards to seven attorneys, one firm

Honorees to be recognized at the MBA Annual Dinner, April 28

BOSTON, Mass. — The Massachusetts Bar Association (MBA) will honor seven attorneys and one law firm with Access to Justice Awards at the MBA Annual Dinner on Thursday, April 28, at the Westin Boston Waterfront. Presented annually by the MBA, the Access to Justice Awards recognize the efforts of attorneys and law firms who have made significant strides in enhancing access to justice.

The 2015-16 Access to Justice Award winners are:

- **Rising Star Award:** Margaretta Homsey Kroeger, Newton, MetroWest Legal Services
- **Legal Services Award:** Valerie Fisk, Worcester, Community Legal Services and Counseling Center
- **Pro Bono Award for Law Firms:** Nutter McClennen & Fish LLP, Boston
- **Pro Bono Publico Award:** Charles R. Casartello Jr., Longmeadow, Pellegrini, Seeley, Ryan & Blakesley PC
- **Pro Bono Publico Award:** Ingrid Martin, Jamaica Plain, Collora LLP
- **Defender Award:** Benjamin H. Keehn, Holliston, Committee for Public Counsel Services
- **Prosecutor Award:** Ellen Berger, Northampton, Hampden County District Attorney's Office
- **Lifetime Achievement Award (posthumous):** T. Richard McIntosh (1948-2015), Falmouth, South Coastal Counties Legal Services Inc.

Read below for more information about each honoree. Honoree photos are available upon request.

In addition to the Access to Justice Awards, the MBA Annual Dinner will include a keynote address by award-winning novelist and screenwriter Dennis Lehane, the presentation of the 2016 MBA Legislator of the Year Award to Senate President Stanley C. Rosenberg (D-Amherst), President's Awards to attorney George G. Hardiman and BMC Clerk-Magistrate Daniel J. Hogan, and the Oliver Wendell Holmes Jr. Scholarship to third-year law student Lauren N. Schaal of Boston College Law School.

ABOUT THE ACCESS TO JUSTICE AWARD HONOREES

Rising Star Award

Margaretta Homsey Kroeger, MetroWest Legal Services

In her own words, Margaretta Kroeger advocates for “people in crisis who are trying to access basic life necessities.” As a government benefits attorney at MetroWest Legal Services, Kroeger, a Newton resident, assists clients who have been denied or improperly terminated from disability benefits, as well as those who have been denied other government benefits, such as food stamps, cash assistance, unemployment benefits, health insurance and emergency shelter.

In 2014, Kroeger volunteered to serve as co-counsel with the Massachusetts Law Reform Institute in a lawsuit filed against the Massachusetts Department of Transitional Assistance. The suit challenged a new automated procedure for those applying for or receiving food stamps, which resulted in thousands of people being improperly denied or terminated from receiving food stamp benefits.

“To help prevent somebody from becoming homeless or help them access basic benefits is incredibly rewarding,” said Kroeger, a graduate of Boston College Law School and Harvard University. “It’s really hard to imagine doing any other kind of work when you see the power that you have to transform people’s lives on a day to day basis.”

Legal Services Award

Valerie Fisk, Community Legal Services and Counseling Center

Valerie Fisk, a supervising immigration attorney at Community Legal Services and Counseling Center (CLSACC) in Cambridge, and resident of Worcester, has represented hundreds of clients in immigration proceedings throughout the past 25 years.

During her career she has achieved a near 100-percent success rate in obtaining legal status for her clients, none of whom have ever been deported under her legal guidance. Fisk, a North Park College and Western New England University School of Law graduate, is deeply committed to providing high-quality legal services to immigrants and refugees and acknowledges the importance of the daily work she conducts on behalf of her clients.

“A client once told me I had the best job because the work that we do allows people to start their lives over,” said Fisk.

Known as an immigration and domestic violence expert in Massachusetts, Fisk was one of the first attorneys in the state to focus on providing representation in Violence Against Women Act (VAWA) and U-visa cases. She has also been one of the pioneers in successfully representing Special Immigrant Juvenile (SIJ) cases. Fisk has conducted numerous immigration law trainings throughout the commonwealth, and frequently participates in trainings facilitated by the Massachusetts Immigrant and Refugee Advocacy Coalition (MIRA).

An accomplished musician, athlete, coach, bee keeper and rosarian, Fisk is a person of many talents who not only balances work with her numerous activities, but also brings joy and creativity to her colleagues and clients.

Pro Bono Award for Law Firms

Nutter McClennen & Fish LLP

Founded by social justice pioneer and (later) U.S. Supreme Court Justice Louis D. Brandeis, Nutter McClennen & Fish LLP has enjoyed a strong commitment to pro bono representation for 135 years. A founding member and challenge participant in the Pro Bono Institute's Law Firm Pro Bono Project, Nutter provides extensive pro bono services on a broad range of issues, and encourages all of its lawyers at every level to get involved with various projects and important causes.

The firm has been highly involved with the KIND program (Kids In Need of Defense), an initiative started by actress Angelina Jolie in collaboration with Microsoft, which provides free legal representation to immigrant teenage children facing deportation. Many of these children arrive at the United States border trying to connect with a family member when they are confronted by immigration authorities. Nutter provides attorneys who represent and counsel these teens on a pro bono basis as they apply for special immigrant juvenile status. The program has recently been expanded to have Nutter work in collaboration with the legal department at EMC to service even more clients.

Pro Bono Publico Award

Charles R. Casartello Jr., Pellegrini, Seeley, Ryan & Blakesley PC

Springfield native and Longmeadow resident Charles Casartello Jr. is a partner at Pellegrini, Seeley, Ryan & Blakesley PC, where he concentrates in personal injury, workers' compensation and Social Security law.

Known for his passion and dedication to pro bono efforts, his proudest moment as a volunteer lawyer was representing victims of the World Trade Center attacks in New York City. Recruited by Massachusetts Bar Association Past President Leo V. Boyle, Casartello worked on four pro bono cases, and represented first responders and families who suffered the loss of a loved one in the 9/11 tragedy.

Casartello, a graduate of Springfield College and Western New England University School of Law, is chair of the Hampden County Bar Association's (HCBA) Pro Bono Committee and Hampden County Legal Clinic, which helps provide "Lawyers for the Day" in the Housing Court, Probate and Family Court, and District Court.

A past recipient of the MBA's Community Service Award, Casartello helped facilitate a "Day of Service" program in Hampden County in which volunteer lawyers are made available to the public to answer common legal questions. Casartello is a past recipient of the HCBA's John M. Greaney Award for his outstanding citizenship to the law community in Hampden County. In 2015, he was the recipient of the Legal Aid Champion Award by Community Legal Aid.

Pro Bono Publico Award

Ingrid Martin, Collora LLP

In 2009, Martin volunteered to represent Joseph Donovan on a pro bono basis before the Massachusetts Parole Board. Donovan was 17 years old in 1993, when he was tried as an adult and convicted of first degree felony murder. Many, including Martin, felt that his sentence of life without parole was out of proportion, given his age and culpability in a fight that abruptly and unexpectedly turned fatal in the fall of 1992.

After a 2013 Supreme Judicial Court decision (*Diatchenko v. District Attorney*) granted parole eligibility to juveniles convicted of life without parole, Martin succeeded in obtaining a parole hearing for Donovan, who became the first juvenile life without parole inmate to appear before the Parole Board after the landmark ruling. In 2014, Martin's staunch advocacy ultimately convinced the board to release Donovan after he had spent more than 20 years in prison.

Martin, a resident of Jamaica Plain and a graduate of Harvard Law School and Yale University, said of her award: "I'm the lucky designee for a large group of people who've been working hard on the issues around juvenile life sentences without parole."

Defender Award

Benjamin H. Keehn, Committee for Public Counsel Services

As a public defender at the Committee for Public Counsel Services (CPCS), Benjamin H. Keehn, a resident of Holliston, has never had a boring day since he began working there in 1987. He has dedicated his career to defending indigent, marginalized, and underserved clients, and has advanced the cause of access to justice as an inspirational public servant for close to three decades.

Keehn, a Columbia University and Northeastern University School of Law graduate, has worked on more than five dozen reported cases. Among his most gratifying projects has been aiding clients who were convicted of murder as juveniles and received mandatory life sentences without the opportunity for parole. As a result of Keehn's work in this area, juveniles convicted of life without parole were granted parole eligibility and the right to a fair hearing in the Supreme Judicial Court's two decisions in *Diatchenko v. District Attorney of the Suffolk District, I and II*.

Described by his colleagues as an outstanding litigator with contagious enthusiasm, Keehn has served as a thoughtful mentor to many young lawyers at CPCS. Whether working with one of his clients or a fellow coworker, he has always displayed a willingness to go above and beyond.

Prosecutor Award

Ellen Berger, Hampden County District Attorney's Office

Ellen Berger, a resident of Northampton, has been a dedicated prosecutor in the Hampden County District Attorney's Office for 25 years. A Springfield College and Western New England University School of Law graduate, she currently serves as the chief of the Grand Jury Intake Unit, a division of the office that has contact with every law enforcement agency in the county.

Described as an unsung hero, Berger plays an important, but often behind-the-scenes role in all Superior Court prosecutions. She screens cases for possible indictment, evaluates evidence, contacts law enforcement agencies to obtain additional information, works with assistant district attorneys to prepare and present cases before the grand jury, and coordinates the administration of the unsolved homicide cases in Hampden County. A key facet of her work is presenting cases to the grand jury, which includes instructing the grand jurors on the law by defining the elements of crimes and legal concepts.

In addition to being a valued and trusted colleague, she has also been praised for her mentoring of younger attorneys as they advance and transition from District to Superior Court. Berger strongly believes that mentoring others is a way of paying it forward and ensuring the fairness and integrity of the criminal justice system.

Lifetime Achievement Award (posthumous)

T. Richard McIntosh (1948-2015), South Coastal Counties Legal Services Inc.

Thomas Richard (Rick) McIntosh of Falmouth spent his entire 42-year career working tirelessly to improve the lives of thousands of low-income families in southeastern Massachusetts. As a civil legal aid attorney at South Coastal Counties Legal Services Inc., formerly known as Legal Services for Cape Cod and the Islands, McIntosh was a trusted colleague and a mentor to many attorneys and paralegals.

His unparalleled commitment to ensuring that low-income families had access to quality legal representation made him a recognized leader in the Massachusetts legal aid community.

An expert in unemployment law, McIntosh litigated many cases before the Supreme Judicial Court and the Appeals Court. He also had a keen understanding of laws pertaining to government benefits, particularly veterans' benefits, in addition to housing, elder and juvenile matters.

“Dad was the sort of person who believed that hard work was its own reward,” said his son, Andrew McIntosh. “He would have been humbled, delighted and probably surprised to receive this award, even though he clearly deserves it.”

Incorporated in 1911, the Massachusetts Bar Association is a non-profit organization that serves the legal profession and the public by promoting the administration of justice, legal education, professional excellence and respect for the law. The MBA represents a diverse group of attorneys, judges and legal professionals across the commonwealth.