

Unsung Hero Award

From: "State Bar of Michigan" <no-reply@wufoo.com>
To: <csharlow@mail.michbar.org>, <webmaster@mail.michbar.org>
Date: 3/10/2018 8:36 PM
Subject: Unsung Hero Award

Name of Nominee: *	Michele P. Fuller
Title:	Founder
Firm or Organization:	Michigan Law Center, P.L.L.C.
Address:	45200 Card Road, Suite 108, Macomb, Michigan 48044-3906
Phone:	5868038500
E-mail:	michele@michiganlawcenter.com
Name of Nominator: *	Ellen "Molly" Burns
Title:	Associate Attorney
Firm or Organization:	Michigan Law Center, P.L.L.C.
Address:	45200 Card Road, Suite 108, Macomb, Michigan 48044-3906
Phone:	5868038500
E-mail: *	ellen@michiganlawcenter.com

Explain the merits of your nomination, submit any supporting materials for your nominee by e-mail, fax, or mail. Give specific examples.

I am writing to nominate Michele P. Fuller (P53316) for the Unsung Hero Award because she has spent her career advocating for individuals with disabilities and their caregivers. I strongly think that Michele should be recognized and applauded for her legal services and advocacy on behalf of individuals with disabilities as well as their caregivers, her nationwide speaking engagements and publications designed to educate other professionals about special needs planning, and for hiring and supporting an attorney who has a significant disability. Please see my attached letter for the full nomination.

Please see the attached document which lists Michele P. Fuller's honors and awards, leadership roles, publications, and speaking engagements.

Attach Document (Optional)



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1.92 MB · PDF

Attach Additional Document (10MB
Limit)



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175.89 KB · PDF

Ellen "Molly" Burns
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Ms. Carrie Sharlow
Representative Assembly Awards
State Bar of Michigan
306 Townsend Street
Lansing, Michigan 48933-2012

March 10, 2018

Re: Unsung Hero Award Nomination for Michele P. Fuller (P53316)

Dear Ms. Sharlow and Representative Assembly Members:

I am writing to nominate Michele P. Fuller (P53316) for the Unsung Hero Award because she is a champion for an often overlooked and under-appreciated population. She has spent her career advocating for individuals with disabilities and their caregivers.

Michele's practice focuses on special needs planning. However, it is not merely a business venture for Michele; it is her calling and her passion. She does not merely verbalize support for individuals with disabilities; she actually puts her words into dedicated practice. She champions individuals with disabilities as well as their caregivers, educates other professionals throughout the country about special needs planning, and has even employed and supported an attorney who has a significant disability.

Michele is nationally known as one of the top special needs planners in the country. She generously shares her expertise. Michele routinely travels the country speaking to other attorneys, paralegals, financial advisors, service providers, and parent groups to share her expertise and educate them about special needs planning. Michele also publishes books and articles about special needs planning to educate other professionals on a local and national level. She has even participated in community outreach and education programs with Blue Cross/Blue Shield. In addition, Michele serves as counsel for several local and national non-profit organizations, which administer special needs trusts.

While Michele is nationally known, her practice has always been based in Michigan. She is the Founder of the Michigan Law Center, P.L.L.C. in Macomb. She is also the Director of Advocacy, Inc., a non-profit organization in Macomb that offers special needs trust administration services for all types of special needs trusts. Michele does not simply practice special needs planning. Instead, she epitomizes what it is to be a champion for individuals with disabilities and their caregivers. Michele approaches each individual and his/her caregiver(s) with unparalleled compassion. While observing her interactions with clients, it is immediately

Unsung Hero Award Nomination for Michele P. Fuller (P53316)

apparent that her heart is in it. She genuinely believes and conveys that each individual with disabilities possesses tremendous value and potential, and is deserving of the utmost love, dignity, and respect. She is known for going the extra mile by counseling families through very difficult situations, tenaciously pursuing appeals to extend Medicare days, and battling insurance companies. Michele ensures that her clients live their best lives and is happy to stand up for them and challenge anyone who seeks to jeopardize their benefits, assets, health, safety, well-being, or spirit.

Michele is exceptionally insightful regarding the unique challenges that her clients face and astutely appreciates and anticipates their needs. She is truly unique in that she has gone above and beyond by building and designing an office that is completely accessible for her clients with disabilities. There is close parking, ADA compliant doorways and hallways, doors that are lightweight and easy to open, large in-suite restrooms, as well as a food and beverage station to accommodate any dietary needs. She has spared no detail, even accounting for flooring transitions, which can be challenging for certain clients. In addition, Michele hosts a yearly client appreciation event at a venue that is accessible for all of her clients who have disabilities. The event is a wonderful opportunity for those clients and their families to escape their difficult and demanding daily routines.

Michele has volunteered as a speaker for the Arc of Macomb County. She also regularly volunteers with Kids on the Go, providing education support to special needs children. In addition, Michele consistently answers questions on the Michigan Association for Justice (MAJ) listserv and responds to inquiries from other attorneys who seek her advice on how to proceed with special needs issues. Significantly, Michele regularly performs pro bono work, which includes providing general guidance, drafting complex special needs trusts, and applying for Medicaid. One particular pro bono case really stands out. A mother had six children, four of whom had severe disabilities. The mother raised enough money to buy a home so that her four disabled children could live independently with Medicaid assistance. However, the mother deeded the home to her two non-disabled children, jointly, with the intent that they would hold the home for safekeeping so that their four disabled siblings could live in it. Unfortunately, after the mother's death, one of the co-owners declared bankruptcy. The bankruptcy trustee was relentlessly pursuing the home, and thus threatening to displace four severely disabled adults. Michele accepted the pro bono case and determined that her efforts to reason with the bankruptcy trustee were futile. So, Michele got creative and managed to convince the debtor to drop the bankruptcy and to join the other co-owner in transferring the home into a special needs trust for the benefit of their four severely disabled siblings. Michele's creative thinking and savvy negotiating skills protected four severely disabled siblings from being evicted, separated, and placed into the system.

It is easy for a person to proclaim that he/she supports individuals with disabilities. After all, who would be so cruel to denounce support for such people who face daily obstacles and challenges that many will never have to consider their entire lives? When it comes to supporting individuals with disabilities, it is easy to verbalize support, but very few actually put their words into dedicated practice. The foregoing examples demonstrate that Michele is a wonderful champion for individuals with disabilities and their caregivers. Yet, one of the most telling

examples of how Michele genuinely champions individuals with disabilities is the fact that she has employed and supported an attorney who has a significant disability. That attorney is me.

I have two severe digestive illnesses which prevent my body from being able to properly digest food. As a result, I require continuous specialized nutrition through a feeding tube. The feeding tube provides my only source of nutrition and constitutes a life-sustaining medical device. I have battled these severe digestive illnesses for several years and have fought to avoid the tube for some time. However, seven months ago, after fighting for as long and hard as humanly possible and after all other treatment options overtly failed, I had no choice but to succumb to the tube in order to save my life. It is anticipated that I will be a 24/7 tube-fed patient for life. Being a 24/7 tube-fed patient requires me to perform my daily routine while wearing a small backpack that carries my feed bag and pump while a tube continuously delivers specialized nutrition into my body.

Despite proudly becoming the only known practicing 24/7 tube-fed attorney in the country, and being medically cleared to return to work without limitations, I discovered that some attorneys frowned upon me because of my feeding tube. However, Michele saw beyond my disability. She focused on my talents and accomplishments, applauded my tenacity and resilience, and hired me as her Associate Attorney. It really takes a phenomenal person to hire an individual with a significant disability. Michele has continued to be tremendously supportive, which has helped me overcome and navigate my disability in the workplace, at court, and at events. When it comes to supporting individuals with disabilities, it is easy to talk the talk, but very few can actually walk the walk. Michele not only walks the walk, but has taken my hand after my major life-change and has invited me to walk with her. Michele and I share a passion for special needs issues and I am incredibly grateful and honored to have the opportunity to learn special needs planning from the absolute best.

Michele is my champion and is a champion for so many others who have disabilities as well as their caregivers. I strongly think that Michele should be recognized and applauded for her legal services and advocacy on behalf of individuals with disabilities as well as their caregivers, her nationwide speaking engagements and publications designed to educate other professionals about special needs planning, and for hiring and supporting an attorney who has a significant disability. She is truly an unsung hero and there is no one more worthy of this award. Thank you very much for your time and consideration.

Sincerely Yours,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Ellen M. Burns". The ink is dark and the handwriting is fluid and legible.

Ellen "Molly" Burns (P76314)

Unsung Hero Award Nomination for Michele P. Fuller (P53316)

Honors and Awards:

Two-year member of the American Institute of Legal Counsel, 2017

Lawyers of Distinction, 2017

Professional Excellence in Estate Planning, Lawyer's Monthly, October 2017

Continental Who's Who, 2010-2017

Michigan Top Lawyers, 2017

Expert Network, 2016-2017

Top Attorney North America, 2017

Elder Law and Special Needs Attorney of the Year, Lawyer's Monthly, 2016

10 Best Elder Law Attorneys in the US, American Institute of Legal Counsel, 2016

Top Special Needs Advocate, Parenting Magazine, 2013

Leadership Positions:

Advisory Board, Academy of Special Needs Planners, 2012-present

Board Member, National Academy of Elder Law Attorneys, Michigan Chapter, 2013-present

President, Advocacy, Inc., a 501(c)(3) non-profit organization, 2005-present

Ex-Officio Chair, Elder Law and Disability Rights Section of the State Bar of Michigan, 2018

Section Chair, Elder Law and Disability Rights Section of the State Bar of Michigan, 2017

Chair-Elect, Elder Law and Disability Rights Section of the State Bar of Michigan, 2016

Secretary, Elder Law and Disability Rights Section of the State Bar of Michigan, 2015

Treasurer, Elder Law and Disability Rights Section of the State Bar of Michigan, 2014

Voting Council Member, Elder Law and Disability Rights Section of the State Bar of Michigan, 2008-2014

President and Council Positions, Macomb County Probate Bar Association, 2000-2011

Publications:

Co-Author, "Special Needs Trusts: Planning for Your Child's Financial Future," NOLO Press, 6th Edition, 2015, and 7th Edition, 2017

Co-Author, "Administering the California Special Needs Trust," iUniverse, 2nd Edition, 2016

Author, "Finding Grace," Michigan Law Center, 2015

Co-Author, "Considerations When Settling a Lawsuit for an Individual Lacking Legal Capacity or a Minor," Michigan Bar Journal, January 2018

Co-Author, "Incorporating a Qualified Settlement Fund (QSF) Into Your Case Resolution Toolkit," Journal: Michigan Association for Justice, Fall 2017, vol. XLIX, no. 2

Co-Author, "Divorce and Disability," Michigan Bar Journal, July 2017

Author, "Issue Spotting For People with Disabilities Going Through a Divorce," MassMutual Special Care Newsletter, Financial Advisors, 2016

Author, "Beware of Unintended Consequences in Elder Law Planning," MassMutual Special Care Newsletter, Special Care Financial Advisors, 2016

Author, "Building a Special Needs Practice," Elder Law Answers, Elder Law Attorneys, 2016

Author, "Planning for a Person with Disabilities," Michigan Bar Journal, 2014

Author, "Top IEP Tips for Parents," www.specialednews.com, NAELA and Special Education, 2013

Co-Author, "Using Third Party Pooled Trusts for Special Needs Planning for Families of Modest Means," June 2013 issue of Bifocal, Journal of the ABA Commission on Law and Aging, ABA Commission on Law and Aging, 2013

Co-Author, "How the Affordable Care Act Affects Special Needs Planning," August/September 2013 issue of NAELA News, NAELA, 2013

Co-Author, "Traps for the Unwary During Special Needs Trust Administration," Estate Planning, June 2013, v. 40, n. 6, Thompson Reuters, 2013

Co-Author, "The Future of Planning for Persons with Disabilities: What Challenges Will Arise?"
NAELA Journal, NAELA-National Academy of Elder Law Attorneys, 2013

Presentations and Speaking Engagements:

Michele co-presented a webinar providing an overview of the establishment and use of a Qualified Settlement Fund for the Academy of Special Needs Planners, December 2017; Speaker, Qualified Settlement Fund Overview, Academy of Special Needs Planners, 2017

Michele presented a highly detailed overview of considerations when purchasing a car from a special needs trust for MassMutual SpecialCare Planners, November 2017; Speaker, Purchasing a Car from a Special Needs Trust, MassMutual, 2017

Michele presented part II of a webinar series regarding divorce and special needs planning for the Academy of Special Needs Planners, November, 2017; Speaker, Planning for Children with Disabilities During Divorce, Academy of Special Needs Planners, 2017

Michele presented part I, of a webinar series regarding special needs planning and divorce for the Academy of Special Needs Planners, October, 2017; Speaker, Planning for Adults with Disabilities During Divorce, Academy of Special Needs Planners, 2017

Michele was a co-presenter regarding Section 8 housing and special needs trust issues for Stafford, October, 2017; Speaker, Section 8 Housing, Stafford, 2017

Michele was a co-presenter for a day and a half intensive on special needs planning for ElderCounsel, September, 2017; Speaker, Special Needs Immersion Camp, ElderCounsel, Attorneys, 2017

Michele was an organizer and presenter at a two-day symposium regarding special needs planning; Speaker and Organizer, Special Needs Planning Symposium, Attorneys and Professional Fiduciaries, 2017

Michele was a featured panelist for Atticus Advisors regarding aspects of practice management; Panelist, Lessons Learned by the Practice Growth Masters, Atticus, Attorneys, 2017

Michele co-presented on drafting issues particular to special needs trusts at the annual spring conference; Speaker, Drafting the World's Best Special Needs Trust, Academy of Special Needs Planners, 2017

Michele presented at the annual MassMutual Special Care conference, June, 2017; Speaker, Divorce Planning for a Child with Disabilities and the Impact of Child Support, MassMutual, Financial Advisors-SpecialCare Advisors, 2017

Michele presented Top Developments in Special Needs Planning on behalf of Michigan Financial Companies in May, 2017; Speaker, Top Developments in Special Needs Planning, Michigan Financial Companies, Financial Planners and CPAs, 2017

Michele presented at the annual Michigan Association for Justice spring conference, May, 2017; Speaker, Using QSFs to Eliminate Headaches and Get Paid Faster, Michigan Association for Justice, Personal Injury Attorneys, 2017

Michele presented a webinar regarding the preparation and submission of successful Medicaid applications for ElderCounsel, April 2017; Speaker, Medicaid Applications Start to Finish, ElderCounsel, Elder Law Attorneys, 2017

Michele presented a webinar for the Academy of Special Needs Planners regarding special needs trust administration, February, 2017; Speaker, Top Ten Mistakes in Special Needs Trust Administration, Academy of Special Needs Planners, Special Needs Planning Attorneys, 2017

Michele presented an Overview of Medicare and Medicaid for the Academy of Special Needs Planners as part of their fundamentals program and as a pre-courser to their annual conference; Presenter, An Overview of Medicare and Medicaid, Academy of Special Needs Planners, Special Needs Planners, 2016

Michele co-presented on the Fundamentals of Estate Planning for Persons with Disabilities for the Academy of Special Needs Planners as part of their fundamentals program as a pre-courser to their annual conference; Presenter, Fundamentals in Estate Planning for Persons with Disabilities, Academy of Special Needs Planners, Special Needs Planning Attorneys, 2016

Michele presented the latest developments in special needs planning at the annual Symposium for ElderCounsel/WealthCounsel; Presenter, Hot Topics in Special Needs Planning, ElderCounsel/WealthCounsel, Estate Planning Attorneys, 2016

Michele was a co-presenter regarding Hot Topics in Special Needs Planning for the Elder Law and Disability Rights Section of the State Bar of Michigan at its fall conference; Presenter, Hot Topics in Special Needs Planning, Elder Law and Disability Rights Section of the State Bar of Michigan, 2016

Michele presented a national webinar for special needs planning attorneys regarding the effect of funding a special needs trust on public benefit eligibility for individuals over age 65; Presenter, Nationwide Effect of Funding Pooled SNTs After Age 65, Academy of Special Needs Planners, Special Needs Planning Attorneys, 2016

Michele presented a national webinar for elder law attorneys regarding how to expand their elder law practice to include special needs planning; Presenter, Expanding Your Practice to Serve Those with Special Needs, ElderCounsel, Elder Law Attorneys, 2016

Michele presented at the MassMutual Annual Special Needs Planning Symposium to speak about particular issues with divorce and persons with disabilities; Presenter, Divorce and Special Needs Planning, MassMutual, Financial Advisors, 2016

Michele presented a national webinar for ElderCounsel regarding best practices when serving an aging population; Presenter, Expanding Your Practice to Serve Our Senior Population, ElderCounsel, Elder Law Attorneys, 2016

Michele presented for the Academy of Special Needs Planners regarding Best Practices when Drafting Pooled SNT Master Trust and Joinder Agreements due to her experience drafting state-centric and national pooled trusts; Presenter, Best Practices when Drafting Pooled SNT Master Trust and Joinder Agreements, Academy of Special Needs Planners, Special Needs Planning Attorneys, 2016

Michele served as a panelist for the Macomb County Community College planned giving workshop on Generation Squeeze, which highlighted adult caregiving issues dealing with aging parents to discussion planning options and resources; Panelist, Generation Squeeze, Macomb County Community College, Consumers, 2016

Michele co-presented at the Insurance Rehabilitation Study Group 2016 Conference in Chicago to discuss settlement planning options for individuals who had sustained traumatic injuries; Presenter, To Settle or Not to Settle, Insurance Rehabilitation Study Group 2016 Conference, Case Managers For Insurance Companies For Catastrophic Injuries, 2016

Michele was a panelist at the annual Michigan Guardianship Association conference as an expert in special needs planning and benefits coordination; Panelist, Michigan Guardianship Association, Professional Guardians, 2016

Michele presented a webinar to estate planning attorneys regarding time management and achieving a work/life balance; Presenter, Manage Your Practice, Manage Your Life, ElderCounsel, Estate Planning, 2016

Michele presented a webinar for the Academy of Special Needs Planners regarding settlement options for minors and adults with disabilities who are receiving a litigation recovery; Presenter, Settlement Planning for Minors or Adults with Special Needs, Settlement Planning, Special Needs Planning, 2016

Michele was a speaker at the MetLife annual national special needs symposium in July, 2015, where she spoke about the interaction between Section 8 housing benefits and special needs trusts; Speaker, Housing and Special Needs Trusts, MetLife, 2015

Michele was a key note presenter at the National Academy of Elder Law Attorneys (NAELA) annual conference in May, 2014, to discuss an article she co-authored which was featured in the Fall 2013 NAELA Journal, the Future of Special Needs Planning. She also led breakout sessions

regarding the impact of the Affordable Care Act on Special Needs Planning and the Trust Review Process: How to Keep Your Special Needs Trustee Out of Hot Water and the Evolving Case Law in this Area; Key Note Speaker, NAELA, NAELA, 2014