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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE: August 8, 2014

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Foundation Honors Three Exemplary Lawyers with Posthumous Awards

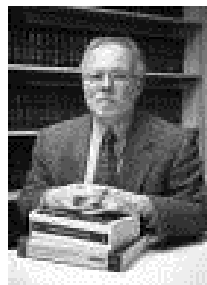
The Michigan State Bar Foundation has selected Hon. Hilda Gage (posthumously) as the 2014 recipient of its highest honor, the Founders Award, which recognizes lawyers who exemplify professional excellence and outstanding community contributions. Past recipients included Dennis Archer, Wallace Riley, Charles Rutherford, Judge Julian Cook, Patrick Bruetsch, Kim Cahill (posthumously), Judge Avern Cohn and John W. Cummiskey (posthumously).

The Michigan State Bar Foundation has also named two recipients (posthumously) for its 2014 Access to Justice Award which honors persons who have significantly advanced access to justice for the poor in Michigan: Michael C. Chielens and Holli Wallace. Past recipients have included Robert Gillett, Candace Crowley and Hon. Chad Schmucker.

All three awards will be presented on behalf of the Foundation at the September 17th State Bar Awards Banquet during the State Bar's Annual Meeting in Grand Rapids.



When Judge Hilda Gage retired from the Michigan Court of Appeals in 2006, then Chief Judge William Whitbeck said what many others would repeat in remembering Judge Gage upon her death in 2010, that her standards were high and she exhibited uncompromising legal scholarship, strength of character and tremendous courage. Judge Gage brought those high standards to her many years of leadership in the Fellows of the Michigan State Bar Foundation. She was known by Foundation Trustees as the "conscience" of the Fellows program because she strongly promoted detailed, fair criteria to insure the high caliber of Fellows membership, which has greatly assisted the Foundation's program of public service. Her dedication to quality and service also took many other forms, including membership on the boards of the Children's Hospital of Michigan and the National Multiple Sclerosis Society and appointments to the Michigan Civil Rights Commission and the Michigan Sentencing Guidelines Commission. She was also the first woman to chair the ABA's National Conference of State Trial Judges, to serve as president of the Michigan Judges Association and to chair the Michigan Judicial Tenure Commission. In 1991, she received the State Bar's highest honor, the Roberts P. Hudson Award. After graduating from Wayne State University Law School, she spent four years in private practice before being appointed (and later reelected twice) to the Oakland County Circuit Court for which she was Chief Judge for two years. In 1997, she was appointed (and then reelected twice) to the Michigan Court of Appeals.



Michael Chielens was executive director of Legal Aid of Western Michigan for nearly two decades until his death in 2013. That service capped a career devoted to serving the poor. Immediately upon graduating from UD Mercy Law School in 1974, he immersed himself in a poverty law, first serving as a staff attorney working on housing issues for a Florida legal aid program where his expertise earned him an appointment by the Governor to a task force studying employment opportunities for public assistance recipients. In 1983, he began working at Legal Aid of Western Michigan (LAWM), becoming its executive director in 1995. During his leadership, LAWM's pro bono program became among the most successful in the state, increasing financial contributions five-fold. Mr. Chielens always made time to handle cases and directly help clients. He was also a state leader, chairing the Legal Services Association of Michigan and serving on various state access to justice efforts. He was also a force to be reckoned with in his community as a member of the Kent County Foreclosure Response, Grand Rapids Vision to End Homelessness, Council of Neighborhood Associations Housing Coalition, Kent County Emergency Shelter Task Force, Grand Rapids Bar Association Board and its Pro Bono Committee, chair of the Fair Housing Center Board and member of the Board of the Legal Assistance Center and of its Steering Committee.



In her short life, Holli J. Wallace was dedicated to her vulnerable clients and to improving the justice system. Before her death in 2013 at the age of 37, she clearly showed the impact that a young person can have on access to justice. She was known by all to be a determined advocate for equal justice and focused her efforts on helping the poor. She served as Legal Services Manager at Common Ground, a shelter and multi-purpose agency helping persons in crisis. Ms. Wallace also worked as a Public Benefits Advocate at the Center for Civil Justice before briefly re-entering private practice. Ms. Wallace served on the Justice Policy Initiative of the State Bar's Committee on Justice Initiatives, examining policy issues that affect poor clients. She also was a member of the Solutions on Self-Help Task Force, helping the group to coordinate and improve resources to people representing themselves in legal matters and specifically studying unbundled legal services and producing detailed research which the Michigan Legal Help program continues to use. Ms. Wallace was a member of the Saginaw County Bar Association, where she served on the organization's Pro Bono Committee and also volunteered at the Bar Association's Free Legal Clinic. Ms. Wallace said her spirit of promoting equal access to justice was inspired by Rosa Parks, whose quote "I sat down to stand up for courage," drove her to go one step farther for her clients each day. She received her law degree from Michigan State University.

Foundation President Margaret Nichols said "These award recipients represent the highest traditions of the legal profession through their dedication to their profession, their community and to access to justice."

The Michigan State Bar Foundation provides leadership and grants to improve access for all to the justice system, including support for civil legal aid to the poor, law-related education, and conflict resolution. For more information, visit www.msbf.org.

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