In 1972, the secretaries and female law students at the Center for Law and Social Policy in Washington, D.C. pulled together a list of demands for the male attorneys in the office. One demand changed the life of Marcia Devins Greenberger—and countless other women. The secretaries and law students wanted to hire a female attorney to establish a project on women’s legal rights. While amenable to the idea, the Center lawyers were not sure that there was enough work for a full-time position. Ms. Greenberger proved there was.

She received her bachelor’s degree and J.D. from the University of Pennsylvania and practiced law in Washington, D.C. before forming and becoming director of the Women’s Rights Project of the Center for Law and Social Policy. The Women’s Rights Project grew rapidly under her leadership, and it became a separate organization, the National Women’s Law Center (NWLC), in 1981. It presently has a staff of over 60 employees. As founder and co-president of the NWLC, Ms. Greenberger has spearheaded the development of women’s legal rights through litigation, legislative advocacy, appearance before executive branch agencies, and public education. She is nationally recognized as a leading women’s rights advocate and an expert in sex discrimination and the law.

Ms. Greenberger has opened opportunities for all women through developing strategies to secure the successful passage of major legislation, including the federal statutory prohibition against sex discrimination in health care in the Affordable Care Act, the Lilly Ledbetter Fair Pay Act, the Pregnancy Discrimination Act, and the Civil Rights Act of 1991. She also has served as counsel in landmark litigation establishing legal protections for women, including a number of U.S. Supreme Court victories strengthening protections for students and teachers against sex discrimination in schools under Title IX of the Education Amendments Act of 1972.

Leading the Center’s effort, Ms. Greenberger worked to secure the confirmation of Justice Elena Kagan to the U.S. Supreme Court and testified at the confirmation hearings. She also was a leader in supporting the nomination of Justice Sonia Sotomayor. Her work included an analysis of the legal record of both women, preparation of congressional testimony and other materials, and outreach to educate the public on the importance of more women and diversity on the bench.

From its beginnings with the Center for Law and Social Policy and before law schools had clinical programs, the NWLC has fostered the development of law students through an internship program that regularly brings students to the Center for intensive training and experience in women’s rights law. These women now include law firm partners, law school professors, judges, government officials, and public interest lawyers around the country. In November, 2007, she oversaw the development of the NWLC’s Leadership 35 program, through which the NWLC reaches out to women lawyers in their mid-30s for their advice and support and in turn provides them with mentoring and networking opportunities during a formative period of their careers. This year’s group numbers over 50 lawyers.

Outside the NWLC, Ms. Greenberger has helped establish the Women’s Law and Public Policy Fellowship program, which provides one-year fellowships for recent law graduates to work on women’s legal issues in various organizations in Washington, D.C. As a founder of this program, she is responsible for creating career opportunities for hundreds of women lawyers now practicing throughout the country. In addition, she helped found the Women’s Appointments Project in the mid-1970s to break through the glass ceiling that has kept talented women from being selected for high-level government positions. Starting with a focus on general counsel positions in cabinet agencies and top Department of Justice positions, the Women’s Appointments Project has had a huge impact in the number of women lawyers holding key positions for almost 40 years.

During the past 40 years, Ms. Greenberger has participated in the development of key legislative initiatives and litigation protecting women’s rights, particularly in the areas of education, employment, health and reproductive rights, and family economic security. Her leadership and contributions are reflected in the wide range of professional honors she has received, including recognition by Working Woman Magazine as one of the 25 heroines whose activities over 25 years have helped women in the workplace, by Legal Times as a top lawyer and one of its 30 champions, and by Legal Times and the National Law Journal as one of Washington’s most influential women lawyers. The New York Times summed it up in referring to her as “guiding the battles of the women’s rights movement.”