While Therese (Terry) Stewart has achieved national acclaim for her groundbreaking advocacy as lead attorney for the city and county of San Francisco in the California state and federal court marriage equality cases, that critical work is but the crowning achievement in a lengthy and successful career in service to women and other underrepresented groups in the legal profession and broader community.

Following her graduation from law school and a clerkship with former Brent honoree Eleventh Circuit Judge Phyllis Kravitch, Ms. Stewart joined San Francisco law firm Howard, Rice, rising to become one of the firm’s early female partners. In her first pro bono case, she represented single mothers who were denied head of household tax benefits by the state of California. Undeterred by her loss in the courts, she persuaded the responsible state agency to change its interpretation of the law. She also served on the board of the Lesbian Rights Project and assisted in its transformation into the National Center for Lesbian Rights. After 20 years at Howard, Rice, she moved to the Office of the City Attorney for the city and county of San Francisco and since 2002 has served as chief deputy city attorney. Ms. Stewart manages more than 100 lawyers who handle civil litigation and represents San Francisco and its officials in key cases.

In 2004, she was thrust into the limelight when San Francisco’s mayor directed the county clerk to issue marriage licenses to same-sex couples, in violation of state law. Ms. Stewart’s defense of the mayor was unsuccessful, but she snatched victory from the jaws of defeat by filing San Francisco’s challenge to the state’s discriminatory marriage laws. Representing San Francisco in In re Marriage Cases, she argued the case through the Supreme Court of California, which held that same-sex couples had the right to marry in California.

When Proposition 8 passed in 2008, Ms. Stewart represented a group of cities and counties that challenged it in state court. Failing that, San Francisco intervened as a plaintiff in Hollingsworth v. Perry, and Ms. Stewart and her team were instrumental in obtaining district court and Ninth Circuit rulings holding that Proposition 8 violates equal protection. The U.S. Supreme Court recently held that the initiative proponents lacked standing to appeal, effectively affirming the district court decision and returning marriage equality to California.

Ms. Stewart was one of the co-chairs of The Bar Association of San Francisco (BASF) Committee on Sexual Orientation (the first of its kind) and co-authored a 1991 groundbreaking guide for legal employers on eliminating sexual orientation discrimination.

In 1999, she served as president of BASF, its first openly gay officer. She co-founded BASF’s School-to-College Program, which provides mentoring and guidance to inner city high school students in preparing for, selecting, and applying to college. That program has helped hundreds of students, mostly ethnic minorities and immigrants, achieve higher education. Ms. Stewart was among the first group to serve on the ABA’s Commission on Sexual Orientation and Gender Identity and was a leader in the effort to make BASF the first major bar in the country to support marriage equality.

Ms. Stewart had been recognized with many awards, including The Bar Association of San Francisco Foundation’s highest honor, the Champion of Justice Award, and the California Bar Journal’s prestigious CLAY award for civil rights. She was featured on the cover of the American Lawyer in 2004 and profiled as one of Ten Lawyers Who Shaped a Decade by the Daily Journal in 2010.

She has been described as the ultimate cheerleader for her colleagues. She often introduces younger attorneys by saying she likes to work with people who are smarter than she is. When honored for her work, she always notes the work of other attorneys and support staff. She is an invaluable mentor who listens to her colleagues’ interests, pays attention to their strengths and weaknesses, and has a knack for giving them assignments that help them grow. And with her visibility handling high-profile litigation, she serves as an inspirational role model for the generations who follow.

Ms. Stewart’s decades of extraordinary advocacy—in both the private and public sectors—in support of women, minorities, the LGBT community and other marginalized groups, exemplify the values the Margaret Brent Award was created to recognize and foster: overarching encouragement and support of women in law and excellence in the profession.