

2008-2009

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**AMERICAN BAR ASSOCIATION'S
GOVERNMENT AND PUBLIC SECTOR LAWYERS DIVISION
ANNOUNCES WINNERS OF 2009 NATIONAL AWARDS**

WASHINGTON, D.C., May 18, 2009 –The American Bar Association's Government and Public Sector Lawyers Division today announced the recipients of its three annual awards for outstanding work in the government and public sector. The awards will be presented at a reception on July 31, 2009 in Chicago at the Westin River North Hotel from 5:00 to 6:30 p.m.

The 2009 Dorsey Award, honoring an outstanding public defender or legal aid lawyer, will be presented to Nicholas Chiarkas, Wisconsin State Public Defender.

In his 21 years as Wisconsin State Public Defender, Chiarkas has managed his office in a client-focused, innovative way. Recognizing the unique issues faced by veterans entering the criminal justice system after serving overseas, Chiarkas set out to organize veteran treatment courts in Wisconsin. Designed to serve non-violent offenders, these courts will offer treatment for underlying mental health issues as an alternative to incarceration. Chiarkas initiated a collaborative model for the courts by working with judges, prosecutors, and veteran organizations. Wisconsin's first veterans' treatment court is scheduled to open in July 2009.

To ensure that the public understands the importance of an effective indigent defense system, Chiarkas proactively educates the state legislature, the media and the public. Chiarkas' outreach initiatives include those designed to keep children out of the justice system by delivering the message "the best defense is no offense," and the formal recognition of individuals and organizations doing extraordinary work with children through the "Wisconsin Cares About Kids Award." In a project coordinated by American University and the US Bureau of Justice Assistance, Chiarkas reached out beyond Wisconsin to help repair the indigent defense system in Orleans Parish after Hurricane Katrina, work that he continues to this day.

The Hodson Award honors an outstanding government or public sector law office. The 2009 Hodson Award recipient is the Children's Law Center of Los Angeles (the "CLC"). Responsible for representing all dependent children in Los Angeles County, the CLC works closely with the child, foster family, extended family and the family of origin to ensure a holistic approach to each child's legal needs. Outside the courts, CLC lawyers attend hospitalization discharge conferences, delinquency hearings, individualized education plan (IEP) meetings, administrative fair hearings, mental health team screenings and many other meetings concerning the child. To facilitate the holistic approach, the CLC created a client-needs fund through outside donations to cover client costs for school supplies, art classes, musical instruments, and field trips. The CLC also provides caregivers with car seats, smoke detectors and other basic essentials.

The CLC has sponsored over 15 pieces of state legislation to improve the lives of foster children in California. CLC advocacy resulted in the passage of a California law that allows foster children to remain in their school of origin after they are placed in a foster home. CLC also sponsored the law that gives every foster child in California age 10 and older the right to attend their court hearings.

The 2009 Nelson Award, recognizing superior contributions to the ABA by a public lawyer, goes to Allen Giles, Vice President and General Counsel of Twin Cities Public Television. In the mid-1990s, the Division sought to increase the participation of state bar association public lawyer leaders. Allen Giles, a leader in the Minnesota State Bar Association's Public Law Section, served on the Division's council from 1998 until he was elected Treasurer in 2000. Elected Division Chair in 2004, Giles made outreach to law students one of his top priorities. Under Giles' leadership the Division created an innovative, user-friendly kit to facilitate Division member presentations of Public Lawyer Career Panel programs. Division members across the country present programs at law schools in their communities providing students an opportunity to conveniently learn about public service using an interactive format. In addition, the Division's law student webpage was overhauled to include comprehensive information on loan repayment assistance programs; career and job hunting resources; membership benefit information; and access the Division's online collaborative publication: the *Federal Legal Employment Opportunities Guide*. Today, Division law student membership stands at 8,576, compared to about 1,080 in 2004.

For more information on these awards or the Government and Public Sector Lawyers Division, call Sarah Hilton at 202/662-1024 or visit www.governmentlawyer.org.