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TALS Announces 2020 Access to Justice Award Winners



The Tennessee Alliance for Legal Services' (TALS) will host its annual Equal Justice University for lawyers, advocates, social workers, and others September 9-10. This year's conference will be online, and the theme, "Resilient Justice: Building Resilience & Ensuring Justice" reflects a focus on equipping participants to advance justice during these unprecedented times. Outstanding keynote speakers and expert presenters will explore how to build resilience and manage change, solutions for legal issues arising from the pandemic and tools for advancing racial justice and equity. Equal Justice University combines cutting edge programming with an inspiring celebration of seasoned leaders and new advocates who are making our civil justice system in Tennessee stronger and more accessible to those who would otherwise be left to navigate the courts alone.

Access to Justice Awards

At the conference, TALS presents prestigious Access to Justice Awards to recognize outstanding service to the equal justice community.

“A highlight of EJU is celebrating advocates who make our civil justice system available to people who are marginalized and would otherwise have no voice in navigating our complicated legal system to protect their rights,” Ann Pruitt, TALS Executive Director, said.

During Equal Justice University, TALS will recognize four honorees for their extraordinary work to promote access to justice in Tennessee.

Tennessee Supreme Court Justice, Cornelia A. Clark is the 2020 Janice M. Holder Access to Justice Award recipient for her strategic leadership to ensure the legal system is open and available to all. The award was created in honor of Janice Holder, the first female Chief Justice of the Tennessee Supreme Court, who spearheaded the creation of Tennessee’s Access to Justice Commission during her tenure as Chief Justice. An important example of Justice Clark’s work to make civil legal help more accessible is the instrumental role she played in developing the Tennessee Supreme Court Access to Justice Commission’s Faith and Justice Alliance (TFJA) project, bringing together faith-based groups in Tennessee who commit to providing legal resources to their congregations and communities. TFJA was created to align needs seen at the local house of worship level with possible legal resources that are nearby. The notion is to connect people in need within a place they already go to seek help with a problem. That place is quite often a place of worship. “I am delighted that Tennessee Alliance for Legal Services is honoring Justice Connie Clark with the Janice M. Holder Award,” said Chief Justice Jeff Bivins. “Justice Clark has made extraordinary contributions to advancing the Court’s priority of ensuring every Tennessean has meaningful access to justice, and we congratulate her on receiving this well-deserved honor.”

[To view Justice Clark's award presentation and acceptance, please click here.](#)

In 2020, collaboration has been especially critical to meeting the civil legal needs of low income Tennesseans, many of whose challenges have been magnified by the impact of Covid-19. Spring Miller, Assistant Dean of Public Interest and Lecturer at Law at Vanderbilt Law School and Emily Stotts, Director of the Community Legal Center’s Immigrant Justice are the 2020 B. Riney Green honorees. The Green Award

is named after Nashville attorney B. Riney Green and honors his legacy of advocacy for legal aid that promoted statewide collaboration to strengthen access to justice across Tennessee.

Ms. Miller is being honored for her leadership in designing and sharing the Worker's Rights Practicum she launched at Vanderbilt Law School in the midst of the pandemic to assist low wage workers on a variety of matters including employment discrimination claims, unemployment benefits, workers compensation, wage and hour and family/medical leave protections. By sharing her model, Ms. Miller also assisted a fellow Tennessee law school in designing their worker advocacy program to ensure that low wage workers have legal help across the state.

[To view Ms. Miller's award presentation and acceptance, please click here.](#)

Ms. Stotts is receiving the Green Award for the collaborations she has passionately forged to provide legal services to underserved immigrant populations. Ms. Stotts partnered with non-profits, law schools and pro bono attorneys from Memphis to Morristown to address "immigration representation deserts," by working to ensure there are qualified immigration attorneys to meet the needs of low income immigrants and their families.

[To view Ms. Stotts' award presentation and acceptance, please click here.](#)

Danielle Woods, Managing Attorney for Pro Bono Programs at Memphis Area Legal Services is the 2020 New Advocate of the Year. Dedicated to helping remove legal barriers to give clients a fresh start, Ms. Woods has worked tirelessly to enlist pro bono attorneys to assist qualifying individuals in the Shelby county Veterans Court and to assist qualifying clients with drivers' license reinstatements, expungements and restoration of voting rights. When the traditional in-person legal clinics were cancelled due to Covid-19, she began hosting virtual legal clinics online and pairing clients with volunteer attorneys by phone, ensuring legal resources remain available.

[To view Ms. Woods' award presentation and acceptance, please click here.](#)

Learn More

To learn more about TALS and the 2020 access to justice award honorees visit <https://www.tals.org/eju>.

Tennessee Alliance for Legal Services (TALS) is a statewide non-profit organization that builds tools and partnerships to strengthen the delivery of civil legal services for low-income and elderly Tennesseans. TALS manages a web portal providing legal information- www.HELP4TN.org, and staffs 1-888-HELP4TN, a toll-free civil legal advice and information phone line. Learn more at www.tals.org.

Last updated on September 10, 2020.

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