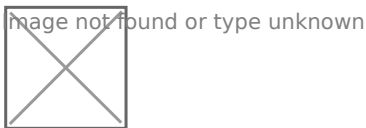


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# 2015 Access to Justice Award Winners Announced

**NASHVILLE, Tenn. (August 3, 2015)** - The [Tennessee Alliance for Legal Services](#) (TALS) will present the 2015 Access to Justice Awards on Wednesday, Sept. 2, at its annual [Equal Justice University](#). The awards honor legal professionals who have demonstrated outstanding leadership in the cause of expanding access to civil legal services.

“Nearly 18 percent of Tennesseans live in poverty and struggle with legal problems relating to basic human needs,” said Ann Pruitt, Executive Director of TALS. “That's why it is so critical for lawyers to make their services accessible to those in need. The award honorees were chosen as the best advocates at expanding access to justice in Tennessee.”



This year's award winners include:

**David R. Yoder** will receive the *Janice M. Holder Award*, named for retired Tennessee Supreme Court Justice Janice Holder. The Holder Award honors an individual who has advanced the quality of justice statewide by ensuring that the legal system is open and available to all. Mr. Yoder is Executive Director of Legal Aid of East Tennessee. He is being recognized for “his many contributions to increasing access to justice in Tennessee, especially in the areas of domestic violence advocacy and medical-legal partnerships.”

“It is very humbling to be recognized for doing something that has been so professionally and personally rewarding,” said Mr. Yoder. “Receiving the *Janice M. Holder: Access to Justice Award* is a special honor in light of the tremendous accomplishments and leadership provided by Justice Holder. I thank Justice Holder, the Tennessee Alliance for Legal Services and everyone who made this possible including the legal aid staff, board members and especially clients who truly deserve this recognition.”

**Lenny Croce** will receive the *B. Riney Green Award*, which recognizes advocates who coordinate statewide efforts to improve the quality of legal services for low-income Tennesseans. Mr. Croce is an attorney with the Legal Aid Society of Middle Tennessee & the Cumberland. He will be honored for “his collaborative efforts to promote law reform for the protection of low income Tennesseans.”

**Robert Downs** will receive the *New Advocate of the Year Award*. This award honors an advocate who has excelled within his or her first five years in public interest law. Mr. Downs is an attorney with Legal Aid of East Tennessee. He will be recognized for “his creative and effective advocacy efforts on behalf of victims of domestic violence in the Knoxville area.”

The Equal Justice University conference is hosted by TALS and co-sponsored by the Tennessee Bar Association. The annual conference is a forum for Tennessee’s legal services providers, pro bono attorneys and access-to-justice advocates, providing them with an opportunity to attend substantive law trainings and to share best practices.

Ramón Arias, retired director of (San Francisco) Bay Area Legal Aid, and a leader in the national civil justice community, will be the keynote speaker at this year’s conference. The full schedule of EJU 2015 events, including the award ceremonies, is available at <http://www.tals.org/EJUtrainings>.

### **About Tennessee Alliance for Legal Services (TALS)**

TALS is a statewide nonprofit organization that strengthens the delivery of civil legal support to vulnerable Tennesseans. TALS is an alliance of the federally funded legal aid programs, independent providers of civil legal services and supporting agencies that are committed to increasing equal access to justice in Tennessee. TALS hosts 1-888-aLEGALz, a free legal services referral and information helpline, as well as a free, email-based legal advice clinic at [www.onlineTNjustice.org](http://www.onlineTNjustice.org).

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