

Court Information Release



United States District Court
Northern District of Illinois, Eastern Division
219 South Dearborn Street, Chicago, Illinois 60604

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TWENTY-SIXTH ANNUAL AWARDS FOR EXCELLENCE IN PRO BONO AND PUBLIC INTEREST SERVICE

CHICAGO – The United States District Court’s Twenty-sixth Annual Awards for Excellence in Pro Bono and Public Interest Service is scheduled to begin at 1:00 p.m., Friday, May 1, 2026, in the James Benton Parsons Memorial Courtroom (2525) of the Everett McKinley Dirksen United States Courthouse at 219 South Dearborn Street in Chicago, Illinois. These awards will honor attorneys for their contributions in helping people most in need of assistance before the United States District Court for the Northern District of Illinois. The program is open to all attorneys and those interested in pro bono and public interest law and is free of charge.

This annual ceremony recognizing pro bono and public interest service before the Court is sponsored jointly by the United States District Court for the Northern District of Illinois and the Chicago Chapter of the Federal Bar Association. The **Hon. Karoline Mehalchick**, the National President of the Federal Bar Association, will be the keynote speaker.

Judge Karoline Mehalchick is a United States District Judge for the Middle District of Pennsylvania, confirmed in early 2024. Prior to her confirmation as a District Judge, Judge Mehalchick served the Court as a United States Magistrate Judge for over a decade, having been appointed by the judges of the United States District Court to that position in July 2013. With that appointment, she became the first woman judge to sit in the Scranton vicinage of the Middle District of Pennsylvania. Judge Mehalchick is a graduate of the Schreyer Honors College of the Pennsylvania State University, and the Tulane University School of Law in New Orleans, Louisiana. Prior to joining the bench, she practiced civil and commercial litigation in Northeast Pennsylvania. Judge Mehalchick is the Jurist in Residence at Widener Commonwealth Law School for the 2025-2027 term.

In addition to her regular judicial duties, Judge Mehalchick currently serves as President of the national Federal Bar Association after many years in leadership of that organization. She has also served on the Judicial Conference Committee on Codes of Conduct, as a member of the Administrative Office of the United States Courts Magistrate Judges Advisory Group, and is a member of the Third Circuit Judicial Council’s Reentry Courts and Workplace Conduct committees. Within the Middle District of Pennsylvania, Judge Mehalchick helped create the Prisoner Litigation Settlement Program and presides over the Scranton vicinage’s CARE court, the district court’s reentry program. She is also very engaged in civics and community outreach, participating in weekly Scholar Exchanges through the National Constitution Center, leading middle and high school students

in discussions about constitutional issues and civil discourse, and helping launch the Middle District's first "Courts and the Community" program last fall.

Throughout her legal career, Judge Mehalchick has been recognized for her contributions to the bar and community and is a recipient of the PBA's Michael K. Smith Excellence in Service Award, the LBA's Margaret P. Gavin Award, which is presented to an outstanding young lawyer member of the Lackawanna Bar Association who is dedicated to service to the bar and community. Judge Mehalchick was recognized in 2012 as one of thirty-five Pennsylvania "Lawyers on the Fast Track" by The Legal Intelligencer, and in May 2020, the PBA's Commission on Women in the Profession as a "Woman Trailblazer."

The awards program will also feature comments and introductions by **Chief Judge Virginia M. Kendall** and **Kristine Argentine**, President-Elect of the Chicago Chapter of the Federal Bar Association.

The United States District Court for the Northern District of Illinois and the Chicago Chapter of the Federal Bar Association proudly recognize the following award winners who will all be publicly recognized at the May 1st ceremony:

Awards for "Excellence in Pro Bono Service"

Brian L. Shaw and Steven Victor, Co-Chairs, 2025 National Conference of Bankruptcy Judges Chicago Conference Opening Reception Committee

J. Gregory Deis, Kyla Sutter, Amber Masha, Sofia Orelo, and Marc Kadish of Mayer Brown

Randall D. Schmidt of the University of Chicago Law School, Mandel Legal Aid Clinic

Nancy J. Rich and Janet R. Widmaier of Katten Muchin Rosenman LLP

Steven Neal Fritzshall and Jenette Rose Fritzshall of Fritzshall & Pawlowski

Natalie J. Spears, Peter John Garthwaite, and Shannon Young Shin of Dentons US LLP, as well as Michelle Minseo Kim of Greenberg Traurig

Deborah Susan Spector of Spector & Lenz, P.C.

Patrick M. Collins of King & Spalding LLP

Hugh C. O'Donnell of Whiteside & Goldberg, Ltd.

Dominick L. Lanzito of Ottosen DiNolfo Hasenbalg & Castaldo, Ltd.

Francis R. Greene of Greene Consumer Law

Steven P. Blonder, Laura Ann Elkayam, and Jason M. Rosenthal of Much Shelist, P.C., as well as Charles Robert Petrof of Access Living

Alexander David Marks, Joshua James Cauhorn, Shana Alexis Shifrin, and Blake A. Roter of Burke Warren MacKay & Serritella, P.C., as well as Aneel Lachman Chablani and Beatriz Adriana Diaz-Pollack of Chicago Lawyers' Committee for Civil Rights

Dean Nicholas Panos, Christopher P. Tompkins, Steven J. Tinetti, and Jeffrey P. Salvatore of Jenner & Block LLP

Raphael Ginsburg of Quinn Emanuel Urquhart & Sullivan LLP

Howard Learner of Environmental Law and Policy Center

Maya Ziv-El of Prairie State Legal Services

Mark Stephen Eisen of Benesch Friedlander Coplan & Aronoff LLP

Zac Holden of HKM Employment Attorneys LLP