



2022 Newsletter

The Independent

2022 ANN KLEIN ADVOCATE AWARDS RECEPTION



The Community Health Law Project's 2022 Ann Klein Advocate Awards reception took place on the evening of Thursday, September 15, 2022, at The Wilshire Grand in West Orange, NJ. This year's single honoree was long-time Community Health Law Project President/Executive Director, Harold B. Garwin, Esq.

Since 1977, Harold Garwin has lead the Community Health Law Project (CHLP) as the President/Executive Director and has

worked tirelessly towards its success. Under his leadership and guidance, CHLP has grown from a start-up nonprofit with a staff of 4 run out of an East Orange basement office with paint cans for office furniture, into a well-respected statewide legal services organization with 10 offices and over 60 attorneys, advocates and support staff serving more than 5,000 individuals per year. Through Harold's efforts, CHLP has continued steering the state of New Jersey towards creating a more just society for residents living with disabilities, chronic health conditions, and the frail elderly. In addition to his work at CHLP, Harold has connected with and supported the community by serving on numerous boards, committees and councils and has been honored and recognized by various organizations throughout the state. Harold has been the "face" of the Community Health Law Project and an amazing example of an unsung hero who puts the needs of others before himself. *"Hal is not just our CEO but our heart, soul and a passionate advocate for our disabled community,"* stated CHLP Board Vice-Chairperson, Ann Marie Burke. Earlier this year, after 45 years with CHLP, Harold retired as the organization's President/Executive Director.

To view this year's ad journal or see more photos from the event, please visit WWW.CHLP.ORG



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MESSAGE FROM THE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

Dear friends,

I am honored to have taken the helm at the Community Health Law Project this year to lead and continue the great work Harold Garwin, our outgoing executive director, began over 45 years ago.

The Community Health Law Project started with humble beginnings out of a basement office with a hand-full of staff. And in the last 45 years we have grown into a premier legal services organization with offices statewide. Despite our growth, our mission has always stayed the same - to provide quality legal assistance to the most vulnerable residents of our state, low income individuals with disabilities, chronic health conditions, and the frail elderly, to help them live and thrive in their communities.

And with the expansion of our existing programs and the development of new exciting initiatives through increased partnerships, we are reaching and assisting more individuals who require legal assistance. The partnerships we have formed and continue to form with health care providers around the state is a testament to the growing recognition that addressing the legal and social needs of consumers is critical to helping improve their health outcomes. And working in tandem with our health care partners as a team to provide true integrated wrap around services has been shown to do just that. As one of our partners coined it, "It is revolutionary work but also just common sense." We agree. Ensuring that individuals have stable housing, sufficient income, safe family environments, and are treated equitably despite their differences all contribute to a positive quality of life to which all individuals are entitled. And that is what CHLP strives to do for our clients every day.

So please read on to learn more about all of the great work our stellar staff is doing and the impact we are making to help our most vulnerable New Jersey residents live and thrive in their communities.

With much gratitude,

Did You Know...

CHLP offers a wide range of
workshops for consumers
& professionals.

Learn more at [**CHLP.org**](https://www.chlp.org)



ERIKA KERBER, ESQ.
President/Executive Director

NEW PARTNERSHIPS & EXPANDED PROGRAMS

CHLP is excited to announce the creation of new partnerships and the expansion of existing programs. These initiatives are in addition to the many other robust programs CHLP has in place.

New Partnership With Family Guidance Center of Warren County

CHLP recently partnered with the Family Guidance Center of Warren County to work specifically with their Integrated Opioid Treatment and Substance Exposed Infants (IOT-SEI) program. This program will provide highly coordinated opioid use disorder treatment, prenatal and postpartum medical services, case management/wraparound care, sober living arrangements and recovery supports to mothers struggling with opioid addiction. CHLP will be a resource for legal services and support for clients enrolled in the IOT-SEI program.

New Partnership With Family Connections

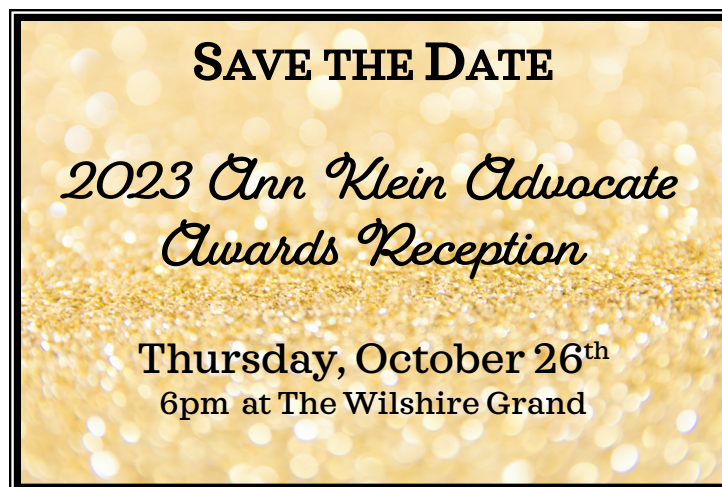
CHLP recently partnered with Family Connections, a Certified Community Behavioral Health Clinic in northern New Jersey. Family Connections will identify which consumers need legal services and advocacy. CHLP attorneys and advocates will provide legal advice, counseling and representation in the areas of public entitlements, access to healthcare, family matters and consumer issues. CHLP staff will also be regularly engaging with Family Connections staff to provide training and consultation to help them better serve their consumers.

Expansion of Programs Funded By The New Jersey State Bar Foundation

This past year, CHLP continued to work on a grant funded by the New Jersey State Bar Foundation in response to the pandemic housing crisis. Through this grant, CHLP has been able to assist a number of low-income individuals with disabilities in housing-related matters to help them avert eviction and promote housing stability. An additional grant has funded CHLP staff to provide legal education to parents, caregivers and other family members of children with disabilities who need to navigate the Special Education system and families of adults with significant intellectual and developmental disabilities who need to petition for Guardianship or need to modify one.

Expansion of Partnership With Horizon

Horizon and CHLP continue to collaborate in Horizon's Neighbors in Health Program. The program aims to address the Social Determinants of Health of high-risk Horizon members by pairing them with Community Health Workers who provide support and linkage services. CHLP staff work closely with these Community Health Workers to identify members who require legal services and then provide needed representation. Due to the overwhelming success of this program, Horizon has expanded these services and CHLP is now providing legal services to low-income participants in Mercer County, in addition to Essex and Passaic Counties.



OFFICE UPDATES

CHLP Bloomfield Office:

As Bloomfield's new Managing Attorney, Rehana Rasool has been excited to lead the office. In October, the office welcomed new Staff Attorney, Ana G. Perez. Ana has been working on several contracts and getting to know CHLP clients. The office staff would also like to congratulate Staff Attorney, Christina Schnyer, on her recent engagement.

Cases of Interest in the Bloomfield Office

CHLP staff represented a long-time client who was struggling with his surmounting debt due to being disabled and on a fixed low-income. CHLP helped the client get a fresh start by filing a bankruptcy on his behalf. Ultimately, he was approved for bankruptcy, and his debt was discharged.

CHLP assisted a client with issues regarding his Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) benefits suspension. After investigating the issue, CHLP discovered that his recertification claim was not being processed, despite being submitted. Our Bloomfield office was able to communicate with the local Division of Family Assistance and Benefits office and his benefits were finally processed and reinstated.

The Office recently represented a client who had been denied Social Security benefits. The client had worked for most of his life, but he was no longer able to do so because of severe physical and mental impairments. Due to the loss of income, the client had been struggling to make ends meet. CHLP obtained voluminous medical records from the client's numerous treating providers in support of his claim for disability. Staff represented the client at a hearing before an Administrative Law Judge, who determined that he is permanently disabled. The client qualified for both ongoing benefits and retroactive benefits, which have helped ease his financial burden.

CHLP Collingswood Office:

The Collingswood Office staff have been focusing on their many cases, as renovations take place to their office building by the new owners. This holiday season, the entire office is participating in the Volunteers of America "Adopt a Family" program. They are fulfilling two families' holiday wish lists in hopes of bringing some joy to families who are less fortunate.

Cases of Interest in the Collingswood Office

Despite a difficult housing search, a client found an apartment and applied for her Section 8 voucher to be used towards the new apartment before the voucher's expiration date in September of 2022. However, the Department of Community Affairs (DCA) claimed they never received the housing application and that the voucher expired. The Collingswood Office assisted in advocating on behalf of the client to DCA by reaching out to endless supervisors with proof of the client's efforts to locate affordable housing with her voucher. As a result, the client was able to move in to her new apartment, which is also in a location unknown to her domestic violent abuser.

The Collingswood office was contacted by a client seeking assistance with a Supplemental Security Income Disability (SSI) appeal. After looking into the case, staff determined that an argument could be made to re-open a prior Social Security Disability (SSD) application. This resulted in an award of \$74,000 in retroactive benefits along with a higher monthly benefit amount.

OFFICE UPDATES

CHLP was able to gain a fully favorable decision from the Social Security Administration (SSA) for a young, transgender client with a dual diagnosis. The Administrative Law Judge found the client's long-term substance abuse was not material and determined that she was permanently disabled. She was awarded a substantial amount of retroactive benefits as the Judge agreed she had been disabled since 2017.

The Collingswood Office represented a client who was being discriminated against for having an emotional support animal (ESA). The landlord cited that the client's dog was a lease violation and began charging a monthly fee even though the client has had this dog for 15 years. Upon obtaining a doctor's note verifying that the dog is an emotional support animal, the client was allowed to retain his ESA, was not charged monthly, and the landlord did not pursue evicting the client.

CHLP Elizabeth Office:

The Elizabeth Office continues to provide services to clients in Union and Hudson Counties. This year the Office was fully reopened to assist our clients in-person and are helping clients navigate landlord/tenant hearings during the post-covid period, including representation in court. Staff have continued to assist clients in Social Security matters, Medicaid/Medicare issues, and with Public Entitlement matters. The office was happy to see office manager, Josue Serrano, promoted to the position of Staff Advocate and Office Intake Specialist, Rocia Ugartchea, promoted to Office Manager. In addition, the office has welcomed Intake Specialist Jainnett Tiru and Staff Attorneys Michael Bonner and Maria Marrero.

Cases of Interest in the Elizabeth Office

The Elizabeth staff have represented a number of clients who were in danger of being evicted. Staff have successfully been able to get a number of these cases dismissed due to procedural defects and a lack of proper notice.

Supervising advocate, Laurie Egeth, represented a client who was terminated from her emergency housing placement by Social Services. Due to her mental health issues, the client has struggled to maintain housing and has been asked to leave several shelters and hotel placements. The county terminated her emergency housing claiming that she had caused her own homelessness. CHLP staff represented her at a fair hearing. The hearing was adjourned after issues were raised that social services lacked witnesses with firsthand knowledge. Since that time, our client has secured stable housing and was able to avoid homelessness. CHLP staff was able to buy the client additional time to locate housing, which led to a favorable outcome.

CHLP Neptune Office:

CHLP's Neptune Office has been very busy working on a variety of grants that will assist in expanding CHLP's existing services throughout Ocean County. In addition, the Neptune Office wished long time supervising advocate, Laura Bagwell, well as she has moved on from CHLP to pursue other endeavors. Laura began working for CHLP in 2002 in a support staff role and had grown over the years to become a true advocate, having fought many tireless battles for clients. Laura's work, knowledge, skills, comradery, and presence in the office and in the organization will be greatly missed. The Office welcomed new Staff Attorney, Veena Vallyathan. Veena's primary focus has been to help residents living with disabilities in housing related matters. The Office was also happy to welcome Attorneys Joshua Forrest and Lauren Myers who are working on various programs.

OFFICE UPDATES

Cases of Interest in the Neptune Office

CHLP assisted a client who suffers from multiple physical and mental disabilities. The client's landlord filed an eviction complaint due to alleged threats against the property manager. The Court held a five-day trial spread out over three months. The Judge ultimately dismissed the case, citing the direct threat analysis and the landlord not engaging in an interactive process after a reasonable accommodation request was submitted.

An attorney in our Neptune office assisted a client who receives a Section 8 housing voucher. She came to us with a Summons and Complaint for eviction filed by her landlord after the Department of Community Affairs (DCA) rejected the landlord's proposed rent increase. The attorney argued successfully that the landlord could not move to evict the tenant for failing to pay an unapproved rent increase, as long as the tenant continues to pay her portion as determined by the DCA. As a result, the eviction complaint was dismissed.

CHLP helped a physically impaired client who is wheelchair-dependent and has impaired speech that makes communication very challenging. She outgrew her wheelchair but was denied a replacement by her Medicaid MCO. Her insurance carrier claimed that the model she requested was not medically necessary and offered her a simpler version. CHLP represented the client at a hearing before an Administrative Law Judge. Due to the overwhelming support of medical evidence and testimony by the client's doctors and family, the judge reversed the MCO's decision to deny coverage of a replacement wheelchair. The client has since received her replacement wheelchair and is very pleased.

CHLP Trenton Office:

The Trenton Office has welcomed two new staff members. David Podell has joined the office as a Staff Attorney. He comes to CHLP with a great deal of experience and a long career in public interest law. Tem Gansukh, the Office's Rutgers Housing Fellow, also recently joined the staff. He will be representing clients in landlord/tenant and other housing related matters.

Cases of Interest in the Trenton Office

CHLP Staff assisted a client with serious mental health issues who struggled to comply with psychiatric treatment. This led to disorderly behavior and the client's landlord filed an eviction complaint. With the help of our community partner organization, the client was able to obtain proper treatment for his psychiatric condition. Staff requested a reasonable accommodation in light of the client's mental health diagnosis. The case went to mediation and staff was able to work out a settlement agreement so that the client can continue to stay in his apartment as long as he continues to comply with treatment.

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SUPPORT CHLP

Consider Making a Donation Today!

Your contribution will go a long way toward helping us better serve those who seek our assistance.

As a nonprofit organization, CHLP provides services to people with disabilities of limited means.

To learn more about how you
can help make a difference,
visit the *Support Our Work* page:

WWW.CHLP.ORG

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