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LSBA to Receive 2023 Harrison Tweed Award from American Bar Association

NEW ORLEANS—The Louisiana State Bar Association (LSBA) has been selected as the recipient of the 2023 Harrison Tweed Award, presented by the American Bar Association's (ABA) Standing Committee on Legal Aid and Indigent Defense (SCLAID) and the National Legal Aid and Defender Association (NLADA).

The award, named after an outstanding leader who championed free legal services for people living in poverty, was created in 1956 by SCLAID and NLADA. It recognizes bar associations that have made extraordinary efforts to improve and expand civil legal services or indigent defense services for people living in poverty in their communities.

The LSBA is being recognized for its creation of innovative Legal Help Access Points to significantly expand access to legal services in underserved areas of the state. With the engagement of local courts, public libraries and non-profit community agencies, Legal Help Access Points have been established (to date) in Harrisonburg, Lake Providence and Vidalia. The Access Points were made possible through a Justice for All (JFA) grant from the National Center for State Courts.

The locations of the Legal Help Access Points are identified as "civil legal resource deserts" or areas outside of a 45-minute drive to an in-person civil legal resource like a civil legal aid office, law library or self-represented litigant desk. The Access to Justice Commission hopes to continue this work beyond the grant and establish additional access points throughout the state. Conversations have begun with interested organizations in St. Bernard Parish and Beauregard Parish.

The Harrison Tweed Award will be presented on Aug. 4 at the annual joint luncheon of the National Conference of Bar Presidents, the National Association of Bar Executives and the National Conference of Bar Foundations at the ABA Annual Meeting in Denver, Colo.

“The LSBA’s commitment to ‘Serving the Public’ has been an ongoing, long-term goal. We are privileged and honored to have our access to justice work recognized by the ABA with the prestigious Harrison Tweed Award,” said 2022-23 LSBA President Stephen I. Dwyer.

“The Legal Help Access Points are the most recent demonstration of the LSBA’s promise to ensure access to justice. The ABA’s recognition of our access to justice work with the Harrison Tweed Award reassures us that these efforts are important and should continue,” said 2023-24 LSBA President Shayna L. Sonnier.

“The Justices of the Louisiana Supreme Court and I congratulate the Louisiana State Bar Association on being selected as the recipient of the 2023 Harrison Tweed Award,” said Chief Justice John L. Weimer. “I am immensely proud that the attorneys and staff of the Louisiana State Bar Association received this richly deserved significant national recognition. By establishing Legal Help Access Points in underserved areas of Louisiana, the LSBA continues to rightly and positively address access to justice issues faced by certain of our state’s citizens, utilizing technology and available resources to assist in ‘civil legal deserts’ to provide a starting point for legal help in those communities. This award appropriately publicly recognizes that Louisiana attorneys are dedicated to assisting the needy and less fortunate and ensuring that all have access to justice. This recognition underscores that our state’s attorneys voluntarily devote that which is irreplaceable, namely their time, training and talent, plus their financial support in doing so much for so many who have so little but such great needs,” Chief Justice Weimer added.

The Louisiana State Bar Association assists its more than 23,000 members in the practice of law. The statewide association, as part of its multi-faceted mission, promotes and maintains access to justice initiatives for the state’s residents, assists the Louisiana Supreme Court in its regulation of the practice of law, upholds the honor of the courts and the profession, and supports programs that increase public understanding of and respect for the law.

The Louisiana Access to Justice Commission is a Louisiana Supreme Court-created committee of the Louisiana State Bar Association dedicated to a coordinated and systemic approach to ensuring the public’s access to the legal system.