

Award: Robert G. Kirchner Legal Justice Award
Recipient: Sargent Shriver National Center on Poverty Law
Presenter: Claudia Lennhoff

Good evening. I'm Claudia Lennhoff and I'm the Executive Director of Champaign County Health Care Consumers.

I would like to ask Gerri Kirchner to come join me on stage for this Award presentation.

I am here to present the Robert G. Kirchner Legal Justice Award to the Sargent Shriver National Center on Poverty Law. Unfortunately, the folks from the Shriver Center were not able to join us this evening, but we are fortunate to have Gerri Kirchner here to receive the award on their behalf. The award is named after Gerri's late husband, Bob Kirchner.

Bob served as our attorney from 1999 to 2005, providing his services pro bono, in the legal struggle to save the Medicare 100 Plus Programs after Provena Covenant terminated the then 15-year old programs without warning or explanation, leaving 1100 low-income seniors without access to affordable care.

Without Bob's legal work, CCHCC would not have been able to sustain a six-year long struggle, which resulted in reinstating the Program. Bob was not only a dear friend to our organization and to me, but he was also my personal hero.

The Robert G. Kirchner Legal Justice Award honors attorneys who use their legal skills in the pursuit of justice, and there is no finer example than the Sargent Shriver National Center on Poverty Law. This year marks the Shriver Center's 50th Anniversary.

The Shriver Center brings together lawyers, community leaders and allies from across the country as the nation's leading advocate for people living in poverty. The Shriver Center is founded on the belief that everyone deserves the right to equal access to justice and opportunity.

Just to name a few examples, the work of the Shriver Center has helped ensure that domestic workers have basic legal protections; that a million workers have the right to paid sick leave; that affordable childcare was restored to the working poor; that 40,000 households kept food on the table. They secured ground-breaking federal guidance to protect fair housing rights of millions of people who have past involvement with the criminal justice system; they've kept the doors open at hospitals and clinics serving more than 700,000 children in Cook County alone, and they helped extend health insurance coverage to 2019 for nearly 41,000 children who would have been left without it.

The Shriver Center has done all this and so much more by using the law to inform public policy to serve the interests of the underserved. The way they work is that they help develop or change laws

and regulations that affect people living in poverty. And then they figure out ways to make those laws and regulations actually work in real ways to help real people.

The Shriver Center is led by their President, John Bouman, whom I've been fortunate to know for over 20 years now.

Under John's leadership, the organization is mission-driven and visionary, detail-oriented and highly effective. Over the last few years, we at CCHCC have benefitted tremendously from working with Shriver Center staff on Affordable Care Act issues.

The Shriver Center provides in-person training for enrollment assisters. At their training, we found it helpful to have experts there to ask about more involved issues that are not explained in the federal and state online training.

Beyond the training, the Shriver Center staff continue to give assisters a space to ask questions through the HelpHub website, which they created. HelpHub is a dream come true for us. Our questions are referred to appropriate agencies; and our cases can be "escalated". When we work miracles on tough cases, Shriver Center and HelpHub are our secret weapons.

The Shriver Center is also playing a major role in statewide and national efforts to protect the ACA and Medicaid, and to address our State's budget crisis.

Shriver Center staff are always there when we need them, and they are always responsive. We frequently call on Stephani Becker and Stephanie Altman for help. We refer to them as "the Stephanies". "Let's ask the Stephanies" is a common refrain in our office.

Shriver Center's work on poverty issues is the line that connects policy and quality of life – that line that frequently gets lost in policy discussions and policy implementation. In policy, the devil is in the details, but so are the angels. Shriver Center staff are the angels we count on. Their advocacy elevates legal and policy discussions and never loses sight of the people whose lives they are working to improve.

On behalf of the Champaign County Health Care Consumers, it is my privilege to present the Robert G. Kirchner Legal Justice Award to the Sargent Shriver National Center on Poverty Law. Gerri Kirchner – thank you for having shared Bob with us, and thank you for being here to receive this award for the Shriver Center.