

Award: Leadership in Government Award
Recipient: Kyle Patterson and Stephanie Fortado, Champaign County Board
Presenter: Claudia Lennhoff

Our community is so fortunate to have Kyle Patterson and Stephanie Fortado serving on the Champaign County Board, and it is my privilege to present the Leadership in Government Award to both Kyle and Stephanie.

The CCHCC Board of Directors awards the Leadership in Government Award to individuals who distinguish themselves in public service as members of government, and these two have certainly done so.

I think that it is fair to say that serving as an elected official on the Champaign County Board is a pretty thankless job.

But really, we owe Kyle and Stephanie our tremendous gratitude for their service, and especially for their valiant and dedicated fight to try to save the Champaign County Nursing Home, and to try to prevent its sale, in particular, to William “Avi” Rothner.

Like us at Health Care Consumers, Kyle and Stephanie viewed the County Nursing Home as an important community health asset that was worth fighting for; worth funding; worth investing in and protecting for generations to come. They understood, better than most on the County Board, that the County Nursing Home – when it wasn’t being sabotaged – provided vital services to our community members who needed long-term care or shorter term rehab services. They understood – because they did their research – that for-profit nursing homes have worse outcomes because they have lower staffing levels so that owners can make more profit and the result is that quality of care suffers.

They understood the value of the drop-in day services available at the County Nursing Home, where people could come for activities, help with bathing, etc. – and that these services are not reimbursed by health insurance, but help people age in place in their homes. Such services are never provided by for-profit nursing homes.

Well, I don’t have time to go into the sad and wretched details of how we lost the County Nursing Home at the hands of the County Board. But it is a fight that we lost in May of 2018, when the County Board voted to sell our Champaign County Nursing Home to William “Avi” Rothner.

Rothner has a nursing home empire – where he owns and operates numerous nursing homes in IL and around the country – nursing homes with shameful and deadly problems, well documented in public health and Medicare reports.

Kyle and Stephanie gave their all in trying to find ways to save the County Nursing Home and avert the sale to Rothner. Kyle almost single-handedly led the earlier referendum campaign to try to increase funding for the County Nursing Home, so it could recover from the losses brought on by the

lack of a state budget for two years under former Governor Bruce Rauner. Kyle organized the door to door campaign for the referendum and worked day and night to get out the vote.

Stephanie led the efforts on the County Board's Finance Committee, working to sort through seemingly purposely confusing financial reports and statements on the Nursing Home, and seeking ways to try to find a positive financial future for the Nursing Home.

Both Kyle and Stephanie always kept in the forefront the needs of the Nursing Home residents, future residents, and the county staff who worked at the Nursing Home. When they spoke and asked questions at County meetings, they were sharp, clear, and informed. They always did their homework.

The County Board never did a proper independent health care valuation of the Nursing Home – instead, they chose to sell the nursing home in 2018, at a price that a brokerage firm determined in 2016. No one should conduct business this way, and we should all be outraged by the shoddy job the county did and how it failed in its most basic due diligence. Kyle and Stephanie fought valiantly for a course correction, for the sake of our community.

Kyle and Stephanie do so much more on the County Board, but we are focusing on their efforts to save the County Nursing Home because they really distinguished themselves in that thankless struggle.

They brought everything they had to that fight: they brought their hearts – their deep caring for our community; they brought their fierce intellects – always doing research, asking smart questions; and they brought their diligence and dedication – working endless hours, tirelessly. And amazingly, they were always gracious.

It truly was a thankless job, and our collective efforts were not enough to carry the day. When the County Board voted on May 24, 2018 – a day I will never forget – we shared a collective heartbreak and sorrow.

Sometimes we lose important fights, but even if we know we might lose, it is important to fight every step of the way. It takes courage and conviction, and Kyle and Stephanie have no shortage of those qualities.

The day after the fight was lost, I reached out to Kyle and Stephanie.

I thanked them for their work and I told them that I saw their hearts and souls in this, their incredible intellects and diligence, and that getting to know them in this struggle was a silver lining.

Kyle and Stephanie are bright shining lights, true souls, driven by love and love for justice – and it's not some abstract or hyper-intellectualized love for justice – it is actuated and enacted, pragmatic, principled, and tireless.

Kyle and Stephanie, we are so fortunate to have you on our County Board and in our community. Your work in local government is thankless, but we hope to remedy that a little bit tonight.

On behalf of Champaign County Health Care Consumers, it is with our tremendous gratitude and deepest appreciation that I present you both with the Leadership in Government Award.