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Robert A. Oakley, Executive Director

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ECBA 2008 Liberty Bell Nomination

Nominee: Ms. Patricia Mickel

Nominated By: Robert A. Oakley, Esq.

I would like to nominate Ms. Patricia Mickel for the Erie County Bar Association's 2008 Liberty Bell Award. She is an example to our community that one person can make a difference in helping others develop a strong sense of individual responsibility so that citizens can recognize their duties as well as their rights. In this process, she has worked cooperatively with her neighbors to make our home a better place to live.

As a single parent in a public housing project in Erie, Pat decided to take a leadership role in helping fellow residents of public housing throughout the city. In 1990 she was the co-founder (along with Thelma Grady, 2005 Liberty Bell recipient) of the Erie Tenant Council, a voluntary association comprised of representatives from all of the Erie Housing Authority's residential complexes. The council works with Erie Housing Authority staff and other social service agencies to develop and implement educational and recreational programs for residents, and to encourage residents to become positive catalysts for change in their neighborhoods. It also refers individuals and families to appropriate legal representation and counsel when circumstances warrant.

As president of the Erie Tenant Council for the past ten years, Pat has emphasized the need for training initiatives and classes designed to teach residents of public housing units organizational and leadership skills so that ordinary citizens can take responsibility for confronting challenges that exist in their communities. She was instrumental in writing and then implementing a Resident Opportunity and Self-Sufficiency (ROSS) grant from the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development that enabled the hiring of a staff person to help neighborhood tenant councils facilitate program goals.

Pat has worked in other ways to develop a collective vision for improving the lives of public housing residents. Examples of her "hands-on" approach to community needs was her work to establish the John E. Horan Garden Apartments Food Pantry. Under her leadership, the food pantry has been open for the past four years, providing much-needed food items to over 100 public housing families on a regular basis. Pat was responsible for organizing groups of residents and other volunteers to staff the pantry, and she continues to devote many hours of her own time to the project.

For the past five years Pat has served as member of the Erie Housing Authority's Resident Advisory Board (RAB), a group that offers input to the Authority as part of their strategic planning process. Pat provided strong leadership to the RAB by first recruiting a cross-section of public housing residents to serve on the RAB, and by joining with her peers to provide guidance to the Authority on programming goals and spending priorities. She also serves on the Housing Authority's

Section 8 Family Self-sufficiency Coordinating Committee, a group that evaluates and recommends Section 8 residents to participate in the Family Self-Sufficiency Program.

Pat was recently part of a planning committee to help the Housing Authority design a handicap-accessible playground for the families living in the John E. Horan Garden Apartments. The playground is scheduled for completion this year (2008).

In addition to her work on behalf of residents of public housing in the city of Erie, Pat has demonstrated an equally strong commitment to the civil legal needs of low-income individuals and families in northwestern Pennsylvania. She joined the board of directors of Northwestern Legal Services in 1992, and has served continuously on the board for the past sixteen years, including numerous terms on the Executive Committee as a board officer. She has also been very active in the Client Council of Pennsylvania, an organization that provides guidance and feedback to the Pennsylvania Legal Aid Network (PLAN), the agency that administers state funds for legal services.

As part of her service to Northwestern Legal Services and other legal aid programs, Pat has been a part of Peer Review Teams for both the Legal Services Corporation (federal) and the Pennsylvania Legal Aid Network (state). She has also been an active participant in the NWLS planning retreats for both staff and board members, and she provided important input into the development of our current mission statement. Pat remains a strong advocate for the civil legal needs of low-income people at home, and across the nation.

In addition to her volunteer efforts for residents in public housing, and legal aid for poverty-level individuals and families, Pat was a Girl Scout troop leader for ten years, and she has been involved with the "Companions on the Way" program administered by the local Area Agency on Aging. When she has the time, Pat also loves to volunteer to read at her granddaughter's school.

The list of past recipients of the Liberty Bell Award is a very distinguished group of local citizens. Patricia Mickel is an important example to all of us that an "ordinary" person, with determination, hard work and a spirit of cooperation with neighbors and friends, can produce "extraordinary" results that benefit our community, and help ensure access to justice for all.

I am proud to nominate Pat Mickel for the 2008 Liberty Bell Award from the Erie County Bar Association.