



## PUBLIC INTEREST LAW CENTER OF PHILADELPHIA

AFFILIATED WITH THE LAWYERS COMMITTEE FOR CIVIL RIGHTS UNDER LAW

### **The Law Center honors the Wolf Family: Four decades committed to Advancing Equality**

Edwin D. (Ned) Wolf started his journey with the Public Interest Law Center of Philadelphia (the Law Center) on an unconventional note: he turned down cases. Building on a mission to “advance the Constitutional promise of equal citizenship to all persons irrespective of race, ethnicity, national origin, disability, gender or poverty,” Ned took only cases that no one else could, or would, do.

After his education at Haverford College and the University of Pennsylvania Law School, Ned worked for his family’s firm, Wolf Block, then as an assistant District Attorney in the Family Division. In 1969, he became the director of our predecessor, the Philadelphia affiliate of the Lawyers Committee for Civil Rights Under Law, an organization of lawyers working pro bono on civil rights cases, launched at the request of President John F. Kennedy. The demand became overwhelming, driving the creation of a staff of full-time public interest attorneys working exclusively on these cases. At Ned’s urging, leaders of the Philadelphia Bar Association incorporated the fledgling civil rights organization as an independent nonprofit in 1974 to ensure a continued focus on systemic reform. Thus the Law Center, or PILCOP, was born.

Ned’s vision, initially, was to focus on “racism in society,” addressing institutional discrimination through the courts. Ned and the Law Center quickly broadened that mission to tackle current social issues through “cases which could change society for the better.” The Law Center began to address more civil rights issues, environmental issues, healthcare, inclusion of people with disabilities, and employment and consumer protection.

Ned’s cases were more than just work to him. He told a reporter: “Some lawyers I know lead two lives --their regular work and then this sort of thing, which interests them. It’s rough on them. I lead only one life.” Ned spent his life working “to make sure that government functions for the people,” until his untimely death in 1976.

Since Ned’s passing, the Wolf family has continued to be a force in the quest for social justice and in sustaining the Law Center. Ned’s mother Eleanor served on the Law Center’s board of directors. His father Robert advocated for changes in our juvenile courts, and an endowment gift from him is the organization’s financial backbone. From her place on the bench, Ned’s widow, the Honorable Flora Barth Wolf, works daily to protect the safety and well-being of children in the child welfare system.

The goals and the vision set by this family are those that we, today’s stewards of the Law Center, endeavor daily to uphold. Bad schools, poverty, discrimination denying the essential dignity of persons of different races or with disabilities, the environment and making sure that government functions for the benefit of its people remain at the forefront of our agenda.

There can be no more fitting way to cap our fortieth anniversary celebration than to dedicate it to the honor of the Wolf family which has influenced so powerfully this organization and this City.