

The Public Interest Law Center of Philadelphia
2007-2008 Report of Accomplishments

The Law Center Mission: *The Law Center is dedicated to advancing the Constitutional promise of equal citizenship to all persons irrespective of race, ethnicity, national origin, disability, gender or poverty. We use public education, continuing education of our clients and client organizations, research, negotiation and, when necessary, the courts to achieve systemic reforms that advance the central goals of self-advocacy, social justice and equal protection of the law for all members of society.*

Included in this Report:

Updates on our Program Areas:

- 1. Children's Health Care*
- 2. Disabilities Rights*
- 3. Discrimination on the Basis of Race, Gender, Disability and Poverty*
- 4. Education Funding and Quality*
- 5. Environmental Health and Justice*
- 6. Voters' Rights*

Staff Participation in Conferences, Speaking Engagements and Training Sessions
Staff Awards and Recognition

CHILDREN'S HEALTH CARE

Building on our successful suit in Pennsylvania, *Scott v. Snider* (1995), the Law Center seeks to ensure that states throughout the nation provide prompt and effective medical services for poor children in accordance with Title XIX of the Social Security Act.

Law Center Settles Michigan Litigation, Westside Mothers v. Olsezewski: On August 13, 2007, Law Center attorneys settled an eight-year-old case on behalf of one million Michigan children enrolled in Medical Assistance. The settlement preserved significant expansions made in 2006 to Michigan's highly-regarded Medicaid dental program and significant increases in reimbursement rates for preventative medical care. The settlement also required state defendants for the first time to collect and produce data regarding children's access to primary and specialty care. This data included information on the number of children actually seen by each practitioner and the length of time each child must wait to obtain an appointment with a primary or specialty provider. Finally, the settlement provided for ongoing consultation and dialogue among representatives of the plaintiffs and state officials. The plaintiffs in the case were the Michigan Chapters of both the American Academy of Pediatrics and the American Academy of Pediatric Dentists, Westside Mothers, a Detroit advocacy organization, Families on the Move, an organization of foster care parents, and a class of children and their families.

Medicaid Suit Florida Pediatric Society v. Agwunobi Survives Challenges in 2007: The Law Center's James Eiseman, together with the Florida Office of Boies Schiller & Flexner, LLP represented more than 1.6 million children enrolled in the Florida Medicaid

program and other plaintiffs in a lawsuit filed in the United States District Court for the Southern District of Florida. The suit sought to improve the children's access to medical and dental care. On January 11, 2007, after extensive briefing and oral argument, the District Court rejected Florida's efforts to dismiss the complaint on the grounds that Medicaid law does not contain a clearly articulated federal right which children may enforce in court, despite contrary decisions in federal courts in other parts of the country. Florida's subsequent efforts to get the Court to reconsider its decision were turned down by the Court on April 24, 2007. These favorable rulings have permitted plaintiffs to move forward with discovery from the state, a critical step toward laying the evidentiary basis for a favorable judgment on the merits. Plaintiffs have taken over 60 depositions and the state has produced to plaintiffs over nine hundred thousand pages of documents.

DISABILITIES RIGHTS

The Law Center endeavors to end discrimination and abuse against persons with disabilities and secure their inclusion and full participation in all aspects of mainstream society, particularly with respect to education, community services, and the criminal justice system.

Agreement with the State of Illinois in Landmark Lawsuit Dramatically Expands Opportunities for Community Living: With Judith Gran serving as co-counsel, the Law Center's clients reached a groundbreaking agreement on Nov. 13, 2008 with State of Illinois officials in *Ligas v. Maram*, a class action lawsuit brought against the State for its ongoing violation of the civil rights of people with developmental disabilities. The agreement, when approved by the court, will bring justice to people with developmental disabilities, giving each of the state's 6,000 individuals currently living in institutions, or at risk of entering an institution, the choice to receive long-term services in integrated community settings. It will also provide detailed protocols for evaluation and monitoring by the defendants to ensure that this is carried out within the set time-limit of six years. [The Law Center's co-counsel were lawyers from Sonnenschein Nath & Rosenthal, LLP and Equip for Equality.](#)

Law Center Amicus Brief Contributes to Victory in Ricci v. Patrick, a Massachusetts Institution Case: On October 1, 2008, the Court of Appeals for the First Circuit reversed a district court order that had blocked state plans to close the Fernald Development Center, the oldest state institution in the country holding approximately 180 individuals with developmental disabilities. The Law Center, along with other advocates had submitted an *amicus curiae* brief on behalf of the National Association of State Directors of Developmental Disabilities Services in support of appellants, Governor Deval Patrick and other Massachusetts state officials who are responsible for services for persons with developmental disabilities.

Law Center Fights for Equal Treatment of Students With Disabilities in Collegiate Sports: In July 2008, the Law Center finally resolved its long-standing lawsuit against the National Collegiate Athletics Association, the University of Iowa and Temple University,

alleging that they intentionally discriminated against Michael Bowers for his learning disability. Michael Bowers was a star football player at Palmyra High School in New Jersey and was heavily pursued by top-tier football schools such as Temple and Iowa. Michael also had a learning disability and took special education classes to meet some of his course requirements in high school. Unfortunately for Michael and other students with disabilities, the NCAA had an initial eligibility rule which disqualified any “special education” course from consideration, regardless of the content of the course. In his suit, Michael claimed that the NCAA rule was discriminatory on its face and that Temple and Iowa stopped actively recruiting him, knowing that the NCAA would find him to be ineligible to play collegiate sports. Early in the suit, the Department of Justice became involved and forced the NCAA to change the discriminatory rule. The case also created significant and favorable law on the question of after-acquired evidence in a discrimination case and the constitutional question of waiver of the Congressional power to impose liability on states for discrimination. The Law Center resolved the case before trial with the University of Iowa for \$500,000. At trial, the jury found that Michael did not have a disability and therefore the Court entered judgment in favor of the NCAA. The Law Center’s co-counsel were lawyers from Bazelon Less & Feldman.

Victory in a Long Running Case Will Result in Move to Community Services for Residents of a CT Institution: On June 4, 2008, nine years after the close of trial, a federal district judge ruled in favor of Law Center clients the Arc of Connecticut, WeCAHR, and People First of Connecticut. Hartford attorney David Shaw and the Law Center’s Frank Laski brought this case on behalf of a class of approximately 700 residents of the institution and the three advocacy organizations in 1994. The plaintiffs alleged that the institution’s directors had violated the residents’ constitutional and statutory rights by failing to move residents into homes in the community. In its June opinion, the district court agreed with plaintiffs that the defendants, the institution, its director and the Commissioner of the Connecticut Department of Mental Retardation failed to determine the wishes of the individuals living in the institution and failed to offer them options for living in the community. The next phase of this important case will be to fashion an appropriate remedy.

Law Center Secures Community Living Arrangements for Individuals with Disabilities in Tennessee: The Law Center’s Judith Gran and Barbara Ransom represented People First Tennessee, an organization that promotes the rights of individuals with disabilities, in two class action lawsuits to close a total of seven institutions for the developmentally disabled and move their residents to community living arrangements with appropriate services and facilities. One of these suits, *People First of Tennessee v. Arlington* was settled on February 15, 2007, though the settlement was originally opposed by the parent-guardian association. The settlement outlined a plan for closure of the Arlington Developmental Center and establishment of appropriate services for the former residents in the community. On February 12, 2008 the Law Center filed a motion for contempt to enforce the schedule for closure outlined in the settlement.

Victory Against Stroudsburg Area School District Results in Guaranteed IED Services for Every Special Needs Student in The District: On March 27, 2007 the Pennsylvania Department of Education Bureau of Special Education ruled in favor of plaintiffs Charlene and Robert Cooney, the parents of a student with learning disabilities, in a complaint brought against the Stroudsburg Area School District. Significantly, the ruling required that the school district provide necessary resources and supplemental educational services not only for the Cooney's son RJ, but for all other similarly situated students in the district. In addition, under the terms of a September 3, 2007 settlement agreement, the district agreed to make it school policy that, "any student who qualifies for special education services pursuant to any state or federal statute shall be provided appropriate accommodations to enable the student to participate in field trips, after-school activities, summer programs and all its programs that are made available to student's classmates who do not have disabilities," after RJ was denied the opportunity to participate in a class field trip with appropriate supports.

Law Center's Historic Gaskin Settlement Continues to Yield Important Benefits: In late 2005, the Law Center settled its *Gaskin* class action suit against Pennsylvania Education officials for failing to enforce the integration mandate of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act. To ensure that students in need of special education would have access to appropriate resources, the settlement established an advisory panel to administer an assessment of each school district's needs in "research-based practices and the provision of supplementary aids and services in regular classes," as well as state-funded discretionary grants to pay for school district initiatives that use training and technical assistance to overcome gaps in knowledge and skills identified by the assessment. At the end of 2006, the funding portion of the settlement became a reality when Pennsylvania Secretary of Education Gerald Zahorchak announced \$1.1 million in "inclusive practices minigrants" to 74 school districts to support "the development and expansion of effective instruction that encourages meaningful participation in regular education settings." In August 2007 the Law Center and its clients were invited to advise the Philadelphia School District as they work to improve the services offered to students with disabilities in the district under the terms of the settlement.

Lower Merion School District Sued on Grounds of Systematic Discrimination against African American Students: On July 30th, 2007, the Law Center filed a class action law suit on behalf of five African American families from Lower Merion School District, Concerned Black Parents, Inc. and the NAACP Mainline Branch against the Lower Merion School District. The Complaint alleged that the Lower Merion School District routinely segregated African American students into below grade level or modified classes that provided them with a substandard education. The Law Center's Barbara Ransom is lead counsel for the case. The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act and the Elementary and Secondary Education Act require the District to provide these students and the members of the class access to the same general education curriculum and quality education which Lower Merion provides to their similarly situated peers. Although only 7.5% of approximately 6,800 students enrolled in the Lower Merion School District were African American, the separate classes where the District placed

Plaintiffs and class members were 90 - 100% African American. The Complaint alleged that, "such grouping can only be attributed to the intentional segregation of these students."

Court of Appeals Upholds Supports and Services to Young Children: On June 15, 2007, an appellate court ruled on a rarely-litigated provision of federal law which requires that services be provided to infants and toddlers with disabilities. The law recognizes that such services can enhance a child's opportunities for success in school if provided early. The court upheld a lower court decision which faulted the county agency for failing to provide twin toddlers necessary services in their natural environment.

Law Center's Director of Disability Projects Testifies in Support of Proposed Regulations on Placement of Children with Disabilities in Regular Classrooms: On April 12, 2007, the Law Center's Director of Disability Projects, Judith A. Gran, testified before the Pennsylvania State Board of Education in support of proposed new regulations in 22 Pa. Code Chapter 14 which make clear that a student cannot be removed from regular class because he cannot achieve at the same level as typical classmates. Instead, the relevant inquiry is whether the student can, with supplementary aids and services, make progress in the goals in his own Individual Education Plan (IEP). Ms. Gran explained the benefit of the proposed regulation to all children. "Research has shown that children with the most severe disabilities gain tremendous educational benefit when they are taught in regular class with needed supplementary aids, services and supports...[and] that all children benefit when children with disabilities are educated in regular class and benefit even more when the supplementary aids and services needed to teach students with disabilities are brought into regular classrooms."

DISCRIMINATION ON THE BASIS OF RACE, GENDER, DISABILITY AND POVERTY

Unnecessary and Discriminatory Inspection of Tour Buses Owned or Operated by African-Americans Challenged in New Jersey: Along with Ezra Rosenberg and Thomas Kane of Dechert LLP, and private practitioner Yvette Sterling, Law Center lawyer Barbara Ransom challenged a practice by New Jersey transportation officials of making unnecessary and excessive stops of tour busses to Atlantic City that are owned and operated by African Americans. The stops are so frequent that plaintiff companies are forced to cancel trips at times when the stops are likely to occur, resulting in a loss of business that has forced many companies to close their doors. The law suit is currently in discovery.

Pennsylvania Human Relations Commission Finds Probable Cause of Gender and Race Discrimination against the Philadelphia Housing Authority. Law Center client Romani Abney received vindication on October 7, 2008 when the Pennsylvania Human Relations Commission (PHRC) found probable cause to credit her allegations that the Philadelphia Housing Authority (PHA) had violated the Pennsylvania Human Relations Act. PHA failed to promote her to a position for which she was qualified and eventually constructively discharged Ms. Abney, an African American woman, due to her race and

gender. The PHRC also found probable cause that she was subjected to incidents of harassment that forced her to work in a hostile environment.

Law Center Participates as Amicus Curiae in Hazelton Litigation: On April 16, 2008, the Law Center joined the Mexican American Legal Defense and Education Fund and 24 other national and local organizations devoted to fighting discrimination to support an appeal challenging a district court order prohibiting renting to or hiring illegal aliens in the City of Hazelton. *Amici* argued that these ordinances are the latest chapter in a pattern of discrimination against immigrants and therefore violate the Fourteenth Amendment's Equal Protection clause. The court heard oral argument in October 2008.

Pennsylvania Human Relations Commission Fines Landlord for Refusal to Rent to African American Family: On April 22, 2008, Law Center clients, an African American family, secured a ruling from the Pennsylvania Human Relations Commission (PHRC) that a prospective landlord discriminated against them when he refused to rent a house to them, leaving a voice message explaining that he did so because the neighbors had expressed unhappiness. The PHRC also awarded money damages to the clients.

Unequal and Unfair Transportation Increase Stopped: Joining a lawsuit commenced by the City of Philadelphia, the Law Center persuaded a Pennsylvania judge to halt a fare increase that would have unfairly and unequally harmed people who needed to ride more than one bus or trolley to get to their schools or jobs. Representing two students and advocacy groups for children, the Law Center and the City of Philadelphia claimed that a decision by the Southeastern Pennsylvania Transit Authority to eliminate transfers—discounted fares for a second vehicle—imposed a disproportionate and unfair burden on city residents who rode several buses or trolleys. In an opinion dated August 17, 2007, the judge called the transit authority's decision “capricious.”

Law Center Victory Ensures Availability of Methadone Treatment for Recovering Addicts in Pennsylvania: On June 15, 2007, a unanimous appellate court ensured that Pennsylvanians seeking to rid themselves of heroin addiction will have access to methadone treatment which, according to the sources quoted in the court's opinion, "has been used for more than 30 years to effectively and safely treat opioid addiction." The court struck down a discriminatory Pennsylvania zoning law that had effectively banned new methadone treatment centers by allowing them only in areas that would be inaccessible to their intended clients, finding that these restrictions were based in “generalized prejudice and fear,” and therefore in violation of the Americans with Disabilities and The Rehabilitation Acts. The suit was brought Law Center Staff Attorney Barbara E. Ransom and chief-counsel Michael Churchill on behalf of New Directions Treatment Services (NDTS), a methadone treatment provider, and its clients. On March 6, 2008, the Court struck down a similar discriminatory zoning law in the city of Dubois based on the decision in the Law Center's NDTS case.

EDUCATION FUNDING AND QUALITY

The Law Center strives to make *Brown v. Board of Education* a living reality, ensuring equal access for all children to a quality educational experience. To that end, it works closely with its clients and collaborators to pursue equalization of resources for all of Pennsylvania's school children.

Law Center Leadership Role in Statewide Education Funding Reform Leads to Historic New Budget: On July 8, 2008, Pennsylvania Governor Ed Rendell signed into law a new state budget in which he approved a \$9.6 billion education budget and the first state funding formula in two decades. This historic event was due to the work of hundreds of advocates, legislators and political leaders, including the leadership and sound guidance offered by the Law Center's Michael Churchill. Since 1994, the Law Center has conducted analyses of per pupil spending patterns in Pennsylvania, revealing serious statewide disparity in education spending both among all of the districts and between largely minority and largely white school districts. In 2007, the Law Center prepared legislation which received significant legislative support, it released a report revealing that state funding for school districts in Pennsylvania had reached an historic new low as a proportion of the total cost of funding schools and Churchill testified before the School Reform Commission and the City of Philadelphia's Education Task Force. In late 2007, in an unprecedented display of unity, organizations around the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania joined to form the PA School Funding Campaign, with Mr. Churchill serving on the steering committee. After meeting with the state's Secretary of Education in late 2007, the Coalition developed proposed legislation which became the legislation ultimately adopted. Mr. Churchill and others secured significant support for the legislation when they persuaded both the Philadelphia and the Pennsylvania Bar Associations to adopt supportive resolutions.

Law Center Releases "Education in the 50 States: A Deskbook of the History of State and Constitutional Laws about Education": On July 2, 2008, the Public Interest Law Center of Philadelphia and the Institute for Educational Equity and Opportunity held a book release at the National Constitution Center in Philadelphia to celebrate and announce the publication of the book they co-produced. On September 9, 2008, The Law Center's Michael Churchill and Jennifer Clarke participated in a Congressional Briefing convened by PA Representative Chaka Fattah on the topic of Federal responsibility for Public Education in the United States. They discussed their findings in preparing "Education in the 50 States" and their expert experience in seeking improved access to quality education for underserved youth.

ENVIRONMENTAL HEALTH AND JUSTICE

The Law Center seeks to provide legal and technical assistance to minority and low-income communities looking to overcome polluting emissions from existing facilities and halt the development of new polluting facilities in the region.

Law Center Launches Public Health and Environmental Justice Clinic: In September, 2008, the Law Center launched a Public Health and Environmental Justice Legal Clinic in partnership with the Drexel University Earle Mack School of Law. The first clinic of its kind in the Philadelphia region, it seeks to provide legal and technical assistance to affected local communities to enforce their environmental rights and, through impact litigation and other methods of advocacy, to empower local activists to improve the public and economic health of their communities. The Clinic is currently staffed by four interns from the School of Law, but the staff will expand to include students from the Engineering and Public Health schools as specific litigation projects take shape. The clinic has offered environmental and legal advice to the Chester Environmental Partnership concerning the planned Chester Riverfront Redevelopment project, and met with local and national environmental and community groups. The Clinic anticipates joining the dialogue on climate change, sustainability and green jobs initiatives in the city of Philadelphia.

Law Center Legal Clinic Appeals Sugarhouse Casino Sewage Permit: The Law Center's Public Health and Environmental Justice Legal Clinic, representing a Philadelphia neighborhood association and a resident of Fishtown, filed an appeal on November 5, 2008 asking Pennsylvania's Environmental Hearing Board to overturn a sewer permit in connection with the proposed development of the SugarHouse Casino. The permit was issued to the City by the Department of Environmental Protection last month when the casino developer sought to hook its sanitary sewer system to the city's waste treatment collection infrastructure in an area that already experiences significant flooding and basement backups in wet weather.

Law Center Co-sponsors Film Screening and Panel Discussion of an Environmental Justice Documentary: On February 9, 2008, The Law Center joined the Delaware County Alliance for Environmental Justice and other grassroots organizations to present an Environmental Justice advocacy event at Widener University. The film "Laid to Waste" was screened, followed by a panel discussion. Made by Drexel students in the late 1990's, this film is considered, "the best case study of environmental injustice and racism available on video." The Law Center's retired environmental justice attorney Jerry Balter is featured prominently in the film, as he worked closely with CRCQL during his career, representing the organization in law suits against the companies that polluted their neighborhoods. Mr. Balter was in attendance and helped fuel the discussion after the screening.

VOTERS' RIGHTS

Law Center Ensures the Provision of Emergency Ballots for Pennsylvania Voters in NAACP v. Cortes: Experience in the 2008 primary election suggested that large numbers of citizens lost their right to vote because of long lines caused by the failure of electronic voting machine. Staff attorney Aaron Zisser argued in an October 12, 2008 op-ed piece that the Philadelphia election commission could and should take simple and necessary measures to prevent excessive wait times that threatened to deter voters on

November 4. On October 23, the Law Center joined with a coalition of Pennsylvania voters and civil rights groups led by the NAACP State Conference of Pennsylvania to file a lawsuit in federal court in Philadelphia seeking to ensure that voters receive emergency paper ballots on Election Day when 50% or more voting machines become inoperable at any polling site in the state. On October 29, Judge Harvey Bartle III issued a decision granting preliminary injunction and enjoining PA Secretary of State Pedro Cortes to direct poll workers to issue emergency ballots immediately when 50% of voting machines in a precinct are inoperable. Secretary Cortes issued a release the same day stating that his office would not appeal the decision and would comply with the Judge's order.

Law Center Suit to Secure Integrity of Voting Process Sustained: On April 12, 2007 the Commonwealth Court of Pennsylvania held that state certifications of electronic voting machines used in 56 counties around the state were deficient because the Secretary of State did not adequately test the machines to ensure that their reliability and provide a means of voter verification or independent audit. In their ruling the Court sharply criticized the Pennsylvania Secretary of State for certifying Direct Recording Electronic Voting systems (DREs) "that provide no way for Electors to know whether their votes will be recognized." The case was filed August 15, 2006 by Michael Churchill of the Public Interest Law Center of Philadelphia, Mary Kohart, a partner at Drinker Biddle LLP and Marian K. Schneider on behalf of 26 individual Pennsylvania voters who alleged that their votes were at risk of being lost or altered because of operational or security failures of the Pennsylvania-certified systems.

PARTICIPATION IN CONFERENCES

- On October 2, 2008, Barbara Ransom moderated a panel on Public Interest/Indigent Legal Defense at the Pennsylvania Bar Association's Diversity Summit. The panel was attended by several hundred lawyers from around the state and Barbara made a presentation on the need to attack the root causes of the astonishing high incarceration rates of African Americans in this country. Intern Anna Laski assisted on the preparation of some of the materials presented.
- The Law Center hosted a Symposium on Equality on May 14, 2008 to celebrate Tom Gilhool's four decades of service. The symposium covered topics ranging from achieving universal health care in Philadelphia to organizing domestic movements world-wide.
- April 24, 2008, Michael Churchill participated in a panel discussion entitled "All Children Left Behind" at the Philadelphia Bar Association's Minority Attorney Conference. The other panelists were Donna Cooper, PA Secretary of Education, and Sandra Dungee-Glenn of the Philadelphia Reform Commission. Mr. Churchill's portion of the presentation was entitled "Pennsylvania's Unequal School Finance System: It Can Be Changed."

- February 14-16, 2008, Barbara Ransom offered two training sessions at the annual PEAK Parent Training Conference in Colorado. The first was entitled IDEA 2004: Key Elements for Quality Educational Supports for Students. The second was entitled Disabilities and Civil Rights: the Federal Laws that Protect People with Disabilities. Participants gave Ransom high marks, with one commenting, “Outstanding. So easy to listen to. She also gave great information that I will be using.”
- On December 7, 2007 The Law Center’s Judith Gran presented a paper on the use of aversive behavioral interventions at the annual TASH conference held in Seattle, Washington. The name of the town hall style conference was “Turning the Corner: Progress toward the Elimination of Aversives, Restraint and Seclusion.” Tonya Carter, a Samuel S. Fels fellow and law student at Villanova, contributed to the research while interning here in the summer of 2007.
- The Law Center’s Chief Counsel Michael Churchill spoke to the Pennsylvania Bar Association Minority Attorney Conference on March 22, 2007 to address the issue of Public School funding gaps. His talk was entitled "Public Education Finance in Pennsylvania: Unequal and Inadequate".
- On March 1, 2007 Judith Gran presented at a conference convened by the Southern Disability Law Center and Southern Poverty Law center to discuss concrete strategies to address the “schoolhouse to jailhouse” pipeline.
- In March 2007 Law Center attorney Barbara Ransom addressed the issue of "How to Use the Gaskin Settlement to Achieve Inclusion Education" as a keynote speaker at the First Annual Inclusion Education Conference, “Inclusive Education: Making it Happen” in Cranberry, PA, organized by the PEAL Center, PA Tash and PDE/BSE. Over 400 parents, students with disabilities, educators, and other professionals were in attendance.
- Barbara Ransom was a presenter at the National Center for Culturally Responsive Educational Systems (NCREST) conference in Washington, DC, held February 7-9, 2007. The topic of the conference was “Leadership For Equity And Excellence: Transforming Education.”

AWARDS AND RECOGNITION

- On December 9, 2008, Attorney Michael Churchill received the Andrew Hamilton Lifetime Achievement award. The award is granted by the Public Interest Law Section of the Philadelphia Bar Association on the basis of factors such as personal vision and commitment, the critical nature of the problems addressed by the nominee’s advocacy, the innovative nature of the nominee’s work, the outcomes and

results achieved through effective advocacy, the difficulty of achievement, and community commitment.

- On November 21, 2008 Thomas K. Gilhool was awarded the John F. Kennedy Memorial Award, given annually by the Northeast Community Center for Mental Health/Mental Retardation to a person deemed deserving by their board of directors as a result of their efforts that help advance the organization's worthwhile cause.
- On March 8, 2008, Judith Gran received the Diane Lipton Award for Outstanding Educational Advocacy from the Council of Parent Attorneys and Advocates (“COPAA”). COPAA’s announcement of the award said that Judith’s “impact on the lives of families cannot be overestimated.”
- On March 11, 2008, the Montgomery County Office of Mental Health and Mental Retardation presented the Law Center’s former Co-Chief Counsel Thomas K. Gilhool with the highest honor given at its annual awards luncheon, the Betty Linker Award, in recognition of his work to open public schools and close harmful state-run institutions, improving the lives of individuals with disabilities. Patrick Broderick, son of the presiding judge in the landmark *PARC v. Pennsylvania* case, accepted the award on Tom’s behalf as he was unable to attend.
- In its annual *Super Lawyer* issue, published in June 2008, Philadelphia Magazine recognized executive director Jennifer R. Clarke for her accomplishments as a lawyer in the Civil Rights field. Ms. Clarke received similar recognition in 2006 and 2007.
- In June 2007, Syracuse University awarded Thomas Gilhool the honorary degree of Doctor of Education in recognition of his groundbreaking work on behalf of people living with disabilities, enabling them to live as active participants in their communities – in her letter inviting Tom to receive the degree, the school’s President noted that inclusion of students with disabilities was a hallmark of Syracuse’s School of Education.
- In February 2007, Thomas Gilhool received the Doctor of Humane Letters from Holy Family University, where he addressed the graduating class, urging them to take action to improve the lives of those suffering in their community.