Three Empire Justice Center Attorneys Are Recognized for Their Outstanding Contributions in Civil Legal Services Across New York State

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(NEW YORK, NY) - This fall, A.J. Durwin, Amos Hart, and Katherine Courtney are recognized for their years of dedication to teaching, practicing, and changing the law for all New Yorkers. The Daily Record and Rochester Business Journal have selected A.J. Durwin, Managing Attorney in Tenant Advocacy, and Katherine Courtney, Senior Statewide Support Attorney, Disability Advocacy Program (DAP) as a 2026 Attorneys of the Year honoree. The Attorneys of the Year Awards pay tribute to lawyers who are working to make the community stronger and advance the law profession. Awards are presented in four categories, with A.J. Durwin and Katherine Courtney both sharing the category in Civil Legal Services. Additionally, Amos Hart, LGBTQ Rights Staff Attorney, was awarded the Robert Uplinger Award at the 2026 GLYS Western New York, Inc.'s Annual Gayla. This award honors those in the LGBTQ+ community who have supported GLYS of Western New York Inc. and its mission.

"The 2026 Attorneys of the Year are outstanding legal professionals. They provide counsel to their clients and businesses in addition to serving as leaders in the Western New York Community," **said Suzanne Fischer-Huettner, managing director of BridgeTower Media/The Daily Record and Rochester Business Journal.** "Their influence and knowledge help to create opportunities for others, making a significant, positive impact on the region. We are pleased to recognize this year's honorees."

A.J. Durwin is a managing housing attorney who represents tenants facing evictions and uninhabitable conditions, with a focus on impact litigation to achieve systemic change. He also provides legal information to community groups, non-profits, and other attorneys. Before joining Empire Justice, A.J. represented hundreds of clients facing eviction in Rochester City Court and handled numerous administrative hearings on public benefits, workers' compensation, and housing subsidies. He also has significant experience on police accountability issues and has published social psychology research at MIT's Saxe Lab and Harvard's Moral Cognition Lab. He graduated magna cum laude from Hofstra University and earned his law degree from Hofstra University Law School.

Amos Hart is a LGBTQ Rights Staff Attorney at Empire Justice Center in Rochester, where they represent LGBTQ clients in obtaining name changes and in other civil rights matters. They also provide LGBTQ-focused know-your-rights trainings to community organizations and advocate at the state level for anti-discrimination and protective policies for LGBTQ New Yorkers. Before joining Empire Justice, Amos spent nearly four years at Neighborhood Legal Services of Western New York, representing claimants seeking SSI and SSDI benefits in administrative hearings and in federal district court. During law school, they gained experience at Prisoners' Legal Services of New York, the Sylvia Rivera Law Project, and Albany Law School's Immigration Clinic, and interned in the legislative office of Senator Julia Salazar. They earned their law degree from Albany Law School and their bachelor's degree in journalism from Purchase College, SUNY.

Katherine Courtney is an accomplished attorney with extensive experience in Social Security law and disability advocacy. Previously, as an Attorney Advisor with the Office of Disability Adjudication and Review, she drafted decisions for the Social Security Administration's administrative law judges and trained new decision writers nationwide. She also served as a law clerk in the Western District of New York. A leader in the local legal community, Katie has served as President of both the Greater Rochester Association for Women Attorneys and the Foundation of the Monroe County Bar Association. She holds a Juris Doctor and Master of Social Work from the University of Buffalo and a Bachelor's in Social Work from Niagara University.

"A.J., Katie, and Amos exemplify what it means to make the law work for all New Yorkers," **said Kristin Brown, President and CEO of Empire Justice Center.** "At Empire Justice Center, our 360 approach means we teach, practice, and change the law, and each of them embodies this ethos. A.J. represents tenants facing evictions, trains advocates and community members on their housing rights, and pushes for systemic change in housing courts. Katie helps people with disabilities secure the benefits they are entitled to, shares her expertise to build the skills of colleagues and partners across the state, and works to improve the systems that too often stand in the way of disabled communities. Amos represents LGBTQ+ clients in securing name changes and other civil rights protections, trains community organizations on LGBTQ+ rights, and advocates for anti-discrimination and protective policies for LGBTQ+ New Yorkers. All three bring a compassion matched with a depth of expertise and tireless dedication to their work. We are proud to see them recognized by their peers and grateful for their service to our clients and communities."

The 43rd Anniversary GAYLA of GLYS of Western New York, Inc will take place on Oct. 20, at The Powerhouse in Buffalo. To learn more about this event, please visit their website https://gayla.glyswny.org/. The Attorneys of the Year recipients will be honored Nov. 16 at an awards celebration at the Rochester Riverside Convention Center, 123 East Main Street in Rochester. Honorees will be profiled in a special section in the Nov. 20 issue of The Daily Record and the Rochester Business Journal and online at NYDailyRecord.com and RBJ.net. For more information, visit NYDailyRecord.com/event/attorneys-of-the-year/ or RBJ.net/event/attorneys-of-the-year/.

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Empire Justice Center

*Empire Justice Center is a statewide nonprofit law firm whose mission is to make the law work for all New Yorkers, particularly for those who need its protection most. We take a 360-degree, comprehensive approach to changing systems by engaging in three major and interconnected areas of service. We **teach the law** by providing training, support and technical assistance to legal services and other community-based organizations; we **practice the law** by providing direct, civil legal assistance to low-income people with a particular focus on those from marginalized communities; and we **change the law** by engaging in policy analysis, research and advocacy and undertaking impact litigation to get at the root of systemic issues.*