



MICHIGAN COURTS NEWS RELEASE

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Child Welfare Award Recipients Honored by Foster Care Review Board for Exceptional Service Work for Children of the Foster Care System

LANSING, MI, November 2, 2015 – Six individuals will be recognized on this week by the State Court Administrative Office’s Foster Care Review Board for their outstanding service to Michigan’s foster children. State Court Administrator Milton L. Mack, Jr., will present the 2015 Child Welfare Awards on Thursday, November 5, at the Crowne Plaza Hotel in Lansing.

The **Foster Care Worker of the Year Award** will be presented to **Diane Tryan** of Catholic Social Services of the U.P. in Escanaba. Ms. Tryan has worked for 12 years as a foster care and adoption caseworker and supervisor. She was nominated by her coworker, Kyle Rambo, who has described Tryan as “possessing a tireless work ethic with positive energy that inspires others around her. Her unending loyalty and service to her community is visible through her outstanding reputation as a motivational educator and devoted assistant to her clients and families she has served.” In addition, Mr. Rambo reports that Ms. Tryan’s involvement as a victim’s Advocacy Counselor for the Diocese of Marquette and volunteer work with the Suicide Prevention Task force in Delta County has shaped the lives of those within her community in a healthy and positive fashion.

Annette E. Skinner, of East Lansing, will be recognized as **Lawyer-Guardian Ad Litem of the Year** for her advocacy for child clients. Ms. Skinner was lauded for her “investment of her time and energy on behalf of her clients, and her collaboration and consultation skills when working with caseworkers to ensure that the children are receiving the services and support they need while in the foster care system.” Kera Wagner, of the Michigan Department of Health and Human Services in Lansing, nominated Ms. Skinner for her outstanding personal, yet effective efforts in providing what she calls “the kind of attention that you hope your child will be able to have from their attorney should they ever need one.”

Elizabeth Warner, of the Law Office of Elizabeth Warner in Jackson, will be honored as **Parent Attorney of the Year**. Ms. Warner was nominated by Tracy E. Green, an attorney of the Detroit Center for Family Advocacy, and was commended for her strong advocacy and creative tactics in representing parents in child abuse or neglect cases. Attorney Green notes that Ms.

Warner's is an experienced, reputable, and knowledgeable attorney who brought needed attention to the inequalities of Michigan's Child Abuse and Neglect Central Registry.

The **Hon. Patricia D. Gardner**, presiding judge of Kent County's 17th Circuit Court Family Division, will be presented the **Jurist of the Year Award** for her "outstanding efforts to facilitate positive outcomes for children brought under the court's jurisdiction due to abuse or neglect." Judge Gardner was nominated by Patty Sabin, the director of CASA Kent County. Since 2010, Judge Gardner has served the Kent County community by providing fair and tireless service to the families of the foster care system. She also founded "The Independent Living Closet," which provides household goods to individuals who are aging out of the foster care system. Ms. Sabin describes Judge Gardner's approach to justice as "groundbreaking" and notes that her approach to justice for the children and parents of the child welfare system in addressing "barriers to permanency" has offered exceptional service to the people of the community for five years.

Zachary and Tisha Estes, of the Methodist Children's Center in Detroit, will receive the **Foster Parents of the Year Award**. The Estes have been foster parents since 1998 to more than 20 children, three of whom are now their adopted sons and for one of whom they are the legal guardians. Nominated by more than one person, Mr. and Mrs. Estes have gone beyond the guidelines of their service in efforts to better the lives of not only the children they raise, but also their families. The Estes have been involved with "Families on the Move," which offers support to foster parents, and Mrs. Estes has served on the Foster Care Review Board of Wayne County. Their endless service to the community, in addition to the incredible support they provide to their children, prompted the nomination from Pamela Talbot, of the Methodist Children's Home Society, as well as Tanya Steele, Zachary Dodson, Laura Berrien, Janice Estes, Malcolm Estes, and a birth parent.

The FCRB, which was created by the Michigan legislature in 1981, serves as a statewide system of third-party review of the foster care system. The program is administered by the State Court Administrative Office, the administrative agency of the Michigan Supreme Court. Citizen volunteers serve on the FCRB's 30 local review boards throughout the state. Local boards review randomly chosen child abuse and neglect cases; the boards assess how these cases are being handled by courts, the Department of Human Services, and private child welfare agencies.

For more information about the FCRB, and for information about volunteering, visit www.courts.mi.gov/fcrb.

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