



VOLUNTEER  
LAWYERS  
PROJECT

VLP

2025 ANNUAL  
VOLUNTEER  
APPRECIATION  
EVENT

PROGRAM BOOK

POWERED BY VOLUNTEERS,  
INSPIRED BY LEADERSHIP

EDWARD W. BROOKE COURTHOUSE

# PROGRAM

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## **OPENING REMARKS**

Joanna Allison, Esq., Executive Director, VLP

## **MESSAGE FROM VLP BOARD**

William (Rob) Roberts, Esq., Chair, VLP Board of Directors  
Introduction by Joanna Allison, Esq.

## **DENIS MAGUIRE AWARD**

Presented by Gabby Young, Employment and Consumer  
Paralegal

## **JUDGE EDWARD M. GINSBURG**

### **GIDEON'S TRUMPET AWARD**

Presented by Abigail McCourt, Esq., Family Law and  
Guardianship Senior Staff Attorney

## **YVETTE C. MENDEZ AWARD**

Presented by Geraldine Gruvis- Pizarro, Deputy Director

## **CLIENT CAUCUS COMMITTEE AWARD**

Presented by Rob Roberts, Esq. VLP Board Chair

## **JOANNA ALLISON LEGACY OF SERVICE AWARD**

Presented by Rob Roberts, Esq. VLP Board Chair

## **KEYNOTE SPEAKER**

James J. Sandman, LSC President Emeritus  
Introduction by Executive Director Joanna Allison

## **THANK YOU, CLOSING REMARKS**

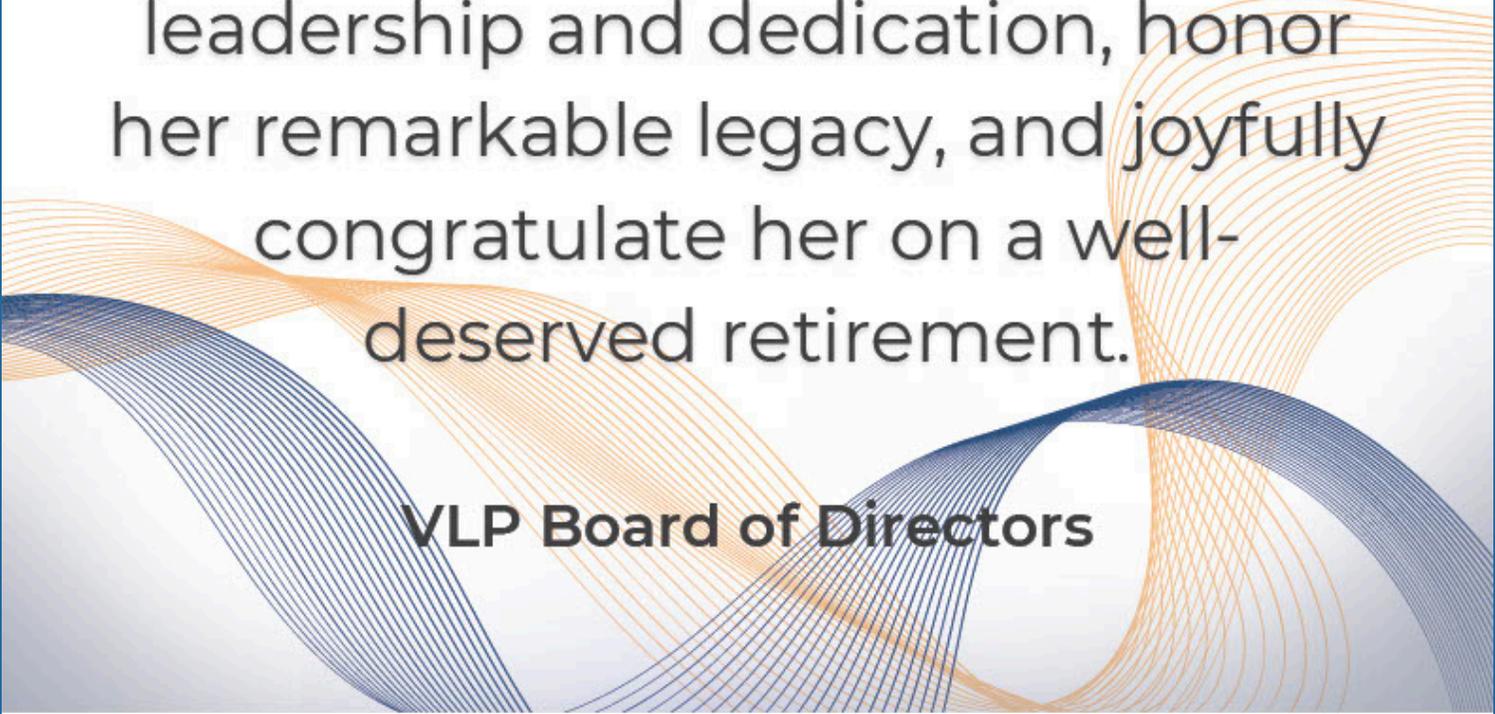
Joanna Allison, Esq.



*With gratitude,*

we honor **Joanna Allison** for her tireless service and unwavering dedication to VLP and its clients.

We are honored to recognize Joanna's remarkable contributions over the years. Her compassion and commitment have transformed lives and strengthened our community. We celebrate her leadership and dedication, honor her remarkable legacy, and joyfully congratulate her on a well-deserved retirement.



**VLP Board of Directors**

# OPENING REMARKS

*Letter from Joanna Allison, Executive Director*

To all of you,

Each year as Executive Director I have expressed my gratitude for your work as VLP Board, VLP Staff, and volunteers and have asked you to stay committed to our clients and our mission. This year, I do the same with a bittersweet goodbye as I leave VLP in your capable hands and ride off in search of the North Carolina sunset.

We have faced many challenges during my time at VLP as a staff attorney and as Executive Director from threatened funding cuts to a global pandemic, to several economic recessions and more, all of which harm the communities we serve the most. You who are here, and those who have passed through our doors have risen to those challenges, faced the hard times, and continued to work hard for our clients and our cause. And now, in these times of incomprehensible ill will toward the people we serve, I leave my position here grateful, humbled, and awed that you still support and hold high regard for our work and our clients.

It has been my mantra, in the words of James Baldwin, that “Not everything that is faced can be changed; but nothing can be changed that is not faced”. Please do not lose the confidence to wish for more.

Yours,

*Joanna Allison*



# Ropes & Gray is proud to support VLP's 2025 Annual Volunteer Appreciation Event.

We congratulate this year's honorees:

Joanna Allison  
*Joanna Allison Legacy of Service Award*

Kevin Finnegan, Esq.  
*Judge Edward M. Ginsburg Gideon's Trumpet Award*

Steve Greenzang, Esq.  
*Yvette C. Mendez Award*

Pam Kogut, Esq.  
*Denis Maguire Pro Bono Award*

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*Joanna,*

I want to thank you from the bottom of my heart for everything you've given to VLP, to our clients, and to the fight for access to justice. The dedication and passion you've shown over the years have left such a powerful mark, not only on this organization but on so many people's lives.

I am especially grateful for the guidance, support, and wisdom you've shared with me over the years. You have challenged me to grow, encouraged me when it mattered most, and shown me what true leadership looks like.

As you step into retirement, I hope it's filled with fun, joy, and all the things you love most, including walking on the beach and bird watching. Enjoy your retirement knowing that you've truly fought the good fight for those who could not fight for themselves.

With gratitude,  
Geraldine

# AWARD DESCRIPTIONS

## **DENIS MAGUIRE PRO BONO AWARD**

Denis Maguire, who served as the treasurer of both the Volunteer Lawyers Project (VLP) and Boston Bar Association, personified the commitment to public interest for which Boston lawyers are noted. VLP established the Denis Maguire Pro Bono Award in 1989 to honor the work of outstanding members of its pro bono panel and to commemorate Denis Maguire's commitment to VLP and access to justice through pro bono efforts.

## **JUDGE EDWARD M. GINSBURG GIDEON'S TRUMPET AWARD**

The Judge Edward M. Ginsburg Gideon's Trumpet Award was established in 2003 to honor the outstanding work of a member of the pro bono panel. The late Judge Edward Ginsburg, who founded Seniors Partners for Justice, named the award after the book *Gideon's Trumpet* by Anthony Lewis, which chronicles the establishment of the right to counsel in criminal cases at all levels of the American judicial system. The award honors those striving to provide similar access to justice in civil matters.

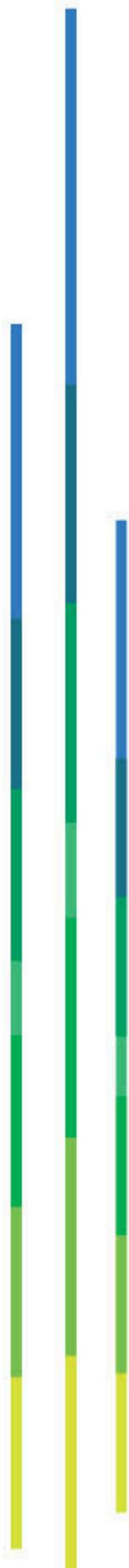
# AWARD DESCRIPTIONS

## **YVETTE C. MENDEZ AWARD**

The Yvette C. Mendez Award was created to recognize a member or project of the Greater Boston Bar that has made an extraordinary contribution to furthering equal access to justice in ways beyond a traditional law practice. The award was established in honor of Yvette Mendez, an African American woman who was president of the Massachusetts Black Women Attorneys, a litigator, teacher, civil rights advocate and VLP Board member. The Yvette C. Mendez Award is a distinguished honor that is not awarded annually. The award has only been bestowed four times up until 2017.

## **JOANNA ALLSION LEGACY OF SERVICE AWARD**

For over three decades, Joanna Allison has been a transformative force in ensuring equal access to legal representation, championing the rights of underserved individuals regardless of their socioeconomic background. As Executive Director of the Volunteer Lawyers Project since 2015, and with roots extending to her early work at the Legal Aid Society of Northwest North Carolina, Joanna has exemplified unwavering dedication to public service and justice.



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*“Alone we can do  
so little; together  
we can do so much.”*

—Helen Keller

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# 2025 DENIS MAGUIRE AWARDEE

## **PAMELA KOGUT, ESQ.**



Pamela Kogut started volunteering with VLP in 2023 in our Consumer Unit working on debt- buyer cases, and since then has lent her expertise and time to make a huge impact on our client community. Her first job after law school was at a small firm on Martha's Vineyard, where she had a mentor who showed her the ropes of litigation and pro bono work. Since then, Pamela knew that public service and pro bono work were her path. In just two years Pamela has worked on over 15 cases and has found satisfaction in knowing her work is making a meaningful impact in the lives of our clients. "In these debt buyer cases, the clients are truly burdened by the debts that they are being sued for. The clients are so grateful when VLP steps in to represent them. When we prevail in these cases, the clients are so relieved to have these burdens lifted", she explains, "I often see that the clients have many problems, that the small claims lawsuit from a debt buyer is often just one of them. But removing the debt literally lightens their load". Pamela approaches her volunteer work from this perspective: "today I can lend help to these clients. Maybe tomorrow it will be me who is relying on the kindness and expertise of someone else. We're all doing our part, and it feels good to be doing mine."

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# 2025 DENIS MAGUIRE AWARDEE

## **PAMELA KOGUT, ESQ.**

When Pamela is not volunteering, she enjoys spending time with family and friends, cooking and gardening. She shares, “I am so touched to have been thought of for this award. I feel surrounded by others in this VLP community who are all doing great work, and it is an honor to work in this community”. Thank you, Pamela, for your contribution to VLP!

# 2025 JUDGE EDWARD M. GINSBURG GIDEON'S TRUMPET AWARD

**KEVIN FINNEGAN, ESQ.**



Kevin Finnegan began volunteering with VLP in 2024. Since then, he has been a consistent and dedicated volunteer at SERV, Family Law and Guardianship, and Housing clinics, volunteering at each clinic almost every week since starting with VLP. In Housing Court, Kevin supports many clients facing homelessness and housing instability, who are

often times struggling with mental health,

financial, and familial issues. He notes that the most satisfying part of volunteering in the housing court is when he can get a tenant a payment plan, a source of financial assistance to pay rent arrears, or any type of continuance in the eviction process and the tenant then expresses extreme gratitude for his help. Kevin shares, "Dealing with a wide variety of clients, especially in the Housing Court, has reminded me how tough many people have it and how grateful so many of them are for the legal advice and words of encouragement that I can provide them". When Kevin is not volunteering with VLP, he enjoys traveling and cycling with his wife, volunteering at the Dana Farber Cancer Institute, and meeting up with his high school friends for a game of poker. Kevin believes that "you are never too old to begin volunteering. It keeps your mind working. It keeps you connected to the real world, provides you with many new friends, and most importantly gives you great satisfaction in helping others who are less fortunate than you are." Thank you, Kevin, for your dedication to VLP and our clients!

# 2025 YVETTE C. MENDEZ AWARDEE

**STEVEN GREENZANG, ESQ.**



Steve Greenzang started volunteering with VLP in 2013, and since then has been an extremely strong and consistent volunteer in our Family Law and Guardianship unit. Recovering from a sudden stroke and unable to return to his practice, Steve came to VLP looking for ways to get into law related opportunities. Since then Steve has completed over 1,000 hours

volunteering with VLP- a true testament to his selfless dedication and commitment to our mission and client community. As Steve reflects on his time at VLP, he recalls how not only has he made an impact on the lives of our clients, but they have had an impact on him as well. He shares: "I love engaging with people and learning their stories. It is humbling to learn about their challenges and how hard they work to overcome those challenges". Steve finds it rewarding to know that he is making a real impact, he shares "I find it satisfying that parties usually express thanks and appreciation for the assistance provided". The advice Steve lives by is "to try to fill each day in pursuit of your interest and passions", and he has done just that! When Steve is not working, he prioritizes time with his wife, children, grandchildren, and extended family, and enjoys bicycling with his wife. Thank you, Steve, for your commitment to VLP!

# 2025 JOANNA ALLISON LEGACY OF SERVICE AWARDEE

**JOANNA ALLISON, ESQ.**



For over 30 years, Joanna Allison's commitment to VLP's mission has made an invaluable impact in the lives of our clients, volunteers, and staff. Joanna always knew she wanted to use her education and skills to even the playing field for low-income people, and through her legal aid journey has done just that. As Executive Director of the Volunteer Lawyers Project since 2015

and with roots extending to her early work at the Legal Aid Society of Northwest North Carolina, Joanna has been a champion for the rights of underserved individuals in legal services and a strong leader in the pursuit of accessibility and equity for all. Since joining VLP in 1993 as a Staff Attorney, she has helped to expand eviction defense work while developing pro bono panels in bankruptcy, consumer, and foreclosure prevention, helping to create the popular "Lawyer for the Day" clinics.

Joanna notes that working in legal services has been a privilege, and she has found inspiration from colleagues who share the same passion, she shares: "I have been fortunate to work for and with dedicated folks like Meg Connolly, Will Ogburn, Ellen Gerber, and Hazel Mack. I know I stood on their shoulders to see the bigger picture".

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# 2025 JOANNA ALLISON LEGACY OF SERVICE AWARDEE

**JOANNA ALLISON, ESQ.**

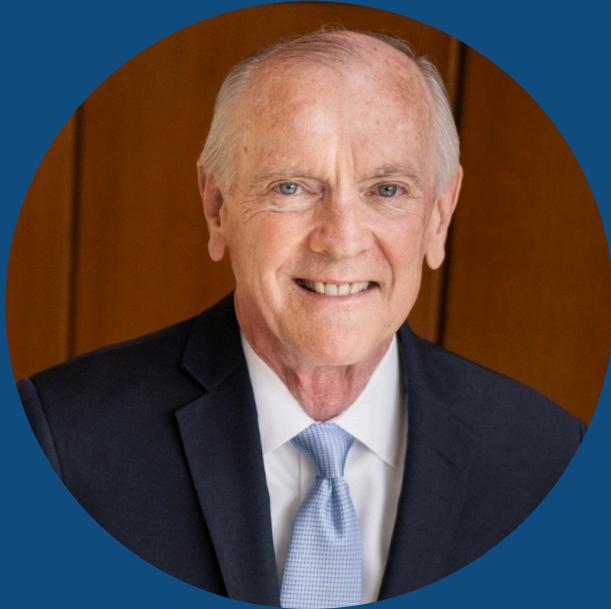
Joanna hopes that her impact on the clients she has helped has been twofold: an immediate impact such as stopping their eviction, and a long-term impact of showing them that they have the right to fair treatment in the courts. She fondly remembers the client population she has served at her time at VLP, and notes the impact they have had on her, “Nothing has had more of an impact on me than my 37 years of representing folks who push through hard times to keep their children fed and safe. They are everyday heroes who just don’t give up. I am grateful to have known them and to have been of some service to them”.

As Joanna looks ahead to her upcoming retirement, she shares the importance of continuing the pursuit of access to justice: “Even in these times of anger and unkindness that seem unprecedented, dare to be optimistic, dare to believe you can change things”. Joanna’s leadership in creating access to justice, devotion to public service, and her passionate advocacy for equity across communities will continue to inspire those who worked alongside her and the future generations of legal aid advocates. Thank you, Joanna!

# KEYNOTE SPEAKER

**JAMES J. SANDMAN**

LSC PRESIDENT EMERITUS



Jim Sandman is Distinguished Lecturer and Senior Consultant to the Future of the Profession Initiative at the University of Pennsylvania Carey Law School. He is also President Emeritus of the Legal Services Corporation, the United States' largest funder of civil legal aid programs. Jim served as President of LSC from 2011 to February of 2020.

Jim practiced for 30 years with the international, Washinton- based law firm of Arnold & Porter. He served as the firm's Managing Partner for a decade. Immediately prior to joining the Legal Services Corporation, he served for three years as General Counsel of the District of Columbia Public Schools. He is a past President of the 100,000-member District of Columbia Bar. Jim is currently Chair of of the American Bar Association's Task Force on Legal Issues Arising from the Coronavirus (COVID-19) Pandemic. He is Vice Chair of the District of Columbia Access to Justice Commission and a member of the American Law Institute, the American Academy of Arts and Sciences, the District of Columbia Public Charter School Board, the District of Columbia Bar Pro Bono Committee, and the advisory board of the Institute for the Advancement of the American Legal System. He is a member of boards of the Pro Bono Institute, Albany Law School, the College of Saint Rose, and Washington Performing Arts.

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# KEYNOTE SPEAKER

**JAMES J. SANDMAN**

LSC PRESIDENT EMERITUS

Jim was named one of the “90 Greatest Washington Lawyers of the Last 30 Years” by the Legal Times in 2008. The University of Pennsylvania Law School has honored him with its Alumni Award of Merit and its Howard Lesnick Pro Bono Award. He has also received the American Bar Association’s Presidential Citation; the District of Columbia Bar’s highest honor, the Justice William J. Brennan Jr. Award; the Distinguished Life Fellow Award from the Fellows of the American Bar Foundation; Legal Services NYC’s Visionary Leadership Award; the Wiley A. Branton Award from the Washington Lawyers’ Committee for Civil Legal Rights and Urban Affairs; the Pioneer of Justice Award from the Neighborhood Legal Services Program of Washington, D.C.; the Hugh A. Johnson, Jr. Memorial Award from the Hispanic Bar Association of the District of Columbia; the D.C. Commission on Human Rights’ Cornelius R. Alexander Humanitarian Award; the Washington Council of Lawyers’ Presidents’ Award; the Council for Court’s Excellence’s Justice Potter Stewart Award; and the Legal Aid Society of Cleveland’s Louis Stokes Paragon Award. He was awarded an honorary Doctor of Humane Letters degree by the College of Saint Rose and an honorary Doctor of Laws degree by Albany Law School and has received Villanova University’s Medallion Award. He has given commencement addresses at Villanova Law School, Rutgers Law School, Albany Law School, and the University of the District of Columbia David A. Clarke School of Law.

Jim is a summa cum laude graduate of Boston College, where he was elected to Phi Beta Kappa, and a cum laude graduate of the University of Pennsylvania Law School, where he was elected to the Order of the Coif and served as Executive Editor of the University of Pennsylvania Law Review. He began his legal career as a law clerk to Judge Max Rosenn of the United States Court of Appeals for the Third Circuit.

(\*Bio from [www/lsc.gov](http://www/lsc.gov))

# *Joanna,*

As you step into this next chapter, I want to take a moment to sincerely thank you. Your commitment to our mission has left a mark on the organization, the clients we serve, and on me personally.

Your dedication to justice and compassion for our clients has been an inspiration. You have always reminded us that every case, every client, and every effort matters and you have modeled what it means to lead with empathy and courage.

On a personal note, I have truly grown in my role under your leadership. Your mentorship and support have given me the space to develop, the confidence to take on new challenges, and the encouragement to keep moving forward.

Thank you for your years of service, your commitment to those who need us most, and the countless ways you have shaped this organization. Your legacy will continue to guide us long after your well-earned retirement begins.

We've got it from here,  
April Jones

# THANK YOU

In recognition & appreciation of Joanna Allison's inspiring leadership and with thanks to the VLP volunteers and staff who make access to justice possible each day.



**ANDREW COHN, ESQ.**  
MEMBER, VLP BOARD OF DIRECTORS

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**Thank you to the selfless volunteers  
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in the Greater Boston area!**



*We appreciate you!*

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## **Justice and Community**

We are proud to support **VLP** in the ongoing mission to increase access to justice.

Congratulations to VLP's dedicated volunteers, and best wishes to **Executive Director Joanna Allison** on her retirement after 32 years of exceptional service.

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We congratulate Joanna Allison, Executive Director  
in her retirement after 32 years of dedicated service,  
shaping VLP's mission and legacy.

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The years Joanna Allison has spent as Executive Director at Volunteer Lawyers Project are the culmination of a career dedicated to the representation of families and individuals from lower income households. The work of courageous, selfless attorneys like Joanna extends the reach of justice and the remedy of law to a wider audience than would otherwise be possible.

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Thank you to the incredible  
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Together, we have built a legacy  
that will shine bright into the  
future.

**JOANNA ALLISON, ESQ.  
EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR**

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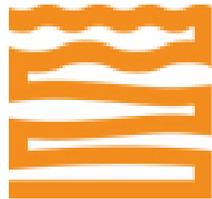
On behalf of the entire VLP staff, we want to express our heartfelt gratitude for your 32 years of dedication to this organization, to our clients, and to the mission of access to justice. Your leadership has shaped VLP into the strong, vibrant organization it is today, and your unwavering commitment has made a lasting difference in the lives of countless people.

We are deeply thankful for the vision, guidance, and care you have shown not only to our clients and community, but also to all of us as staff. You have been an inspiring leader, a mentor, and a role model in how to lead with both strength and compassion.

As you begin this new chapter of retirement, we wish you many wonderful adventures ahead. You leave behind a legacy of impact and hope, and you will always be part of the VLP family. Congratulations on this well-deserved milestone!

With gratitude and admiration,  
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