

**AMERICAN BAR ASSOCIATION**

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**CALIFORNIA CIVIL RIGHTS ATTORNEY, CLAUDIA B. CENTER, TO RECEIVE  
2009 PAUL G. HEARNE AWARD FOR DISABILITY RIGHTS**

WASHINGTON, D.C., June 12, 2009 – The American Bar Association Commission on Mental and Physical Disability Law has awarded the 2009 Paul G. Hearne Award for Disability Rights to **Claudia B. Center, Senior Staff Attorney for the Legal Aid Society – Employment Law Center** in San Francisco, California. Ms. Center will receive the award at the Commission's annual reception at the ABA 2009 Annual Meeting on Monday, August 3 in Chicago, IL. The event will begin at 6 P.M. at the Hyatt Regency Chicago Columbus Hall, Gold Level, East Tower.

The **Paul G. Hearne Award for Disability Rights** is presented each year to an individual or organization that has performed exemplary service in furthering the rights, dignity and access to justice for some 54 million Americans with disabilities. The award is co-sponsored by the Starbucks Coffee Company.



**Claudia B. Center, Esq.** is an employment and disability rights litigator and policymaker whose efforts have contributed greatly to the advancement of legal rights for persons with disabilities. She has been directly involved in several landmark cases, including *U.S. Airways, Inc. v. Barnett*, in which she argued before the U.S. Supreme Court that there should be no presumption under the Americans with Disabilities Act that reasonable accommodation requests that may interfere with seniority rights of other workers constitute an undue burden. *Barnett* is frequently cited by disability advocates because of its

clear articulation that rules that seem neutral on their face still may be discriminatory.

She also wrote amicus curiae briefs in other important disability cases, including two other U.S. Supreme Court decisions supporting the individual rights of persons with disabilities over the sovereignty rights of the states (*Board of Trustees of University of Alabama v. Garrett*) and the rights of persons who have a past record of drug addiction (*Raytheon Company v. Hernandez*), respectively. Additionally, she has helped with state and federal litigation strategies.

Ms. Center was a driving force behind a coalition that broadened the definition of disability under California law and played a critical role in the passing of the ADA Amendments Act of 2008, partaking in roundtables, drafting language, and negotiating with others in the disability community. Moreover, she has published and lectured across the country on disability rights issues.

**Paul G. Hearne** (1950-1998), for whom the award was named, was born with a connective tissue disorder that physically limited his growth and restricted his movement. Through tenacity, intelligence and initiative, he created opportunities for himself and others, and proved a leader for all people with disabilities. Hearne's life was marked by many pioneering endeavors in the legal and disability communities. He served as the director of Just One Break, Inc., the nation's first private job placement agency for people with disabilities; the National Council on Disability; the Dole Foundation for Employment of People with Disabilities; the International Center for the Disabled; the Very Special Arts International Fund; and the Osteogenesis Imperfecta Foundation.

With more than 400,000 members, the **American Bar Association** is the largest voluntary professional membership organization in the world. As the national voice of the legal profession, the ABA works to improve the administration of justice, promotes programs that assist lawyers and judges in their work, accredits law schools, provides continuing legal education, and works to build public understanding around the world of the importance of the rule of law.