

NEWS RELEASE

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SERRANO NAMED 2010 LIBERTY BELL AWARD WINNER

CHICAGO, ILL. (April 22, 2010)—Bertha Serrano, Drinker Biddle & Reath LLP, will be honored with the 2010 Liberty Bell Award at the annual Judges' Reception at 5 p.m., Monday, April 26, at the Chicago Bar Association (CBA), 321 S. Plymouth Court, Chicago. The award is presented by the Young Lawyers Section (YLS) of the CBA as part of its annual Community Law Week Celebration and recognizes a member of the community who is not an attorney and who has rendered service that strengthens the effectiveness of the American system of freedom under law.

Serrano, a paralegal at Drinker, volunteers her time as coordinator of the firm's Chicago Volunteer Legal Clinic held monthly at Our Lady of Mercy Catholic Church in the Albany Park neighborhood of Chicago. Fluent in Spanish, Serrano serves as a bridge between attorneys and clients in the neighborhood, most of whom are Mexican and Central American immigrants.

Drinker also handles many Violence Against Women Act (VAWA) and asylum cases sent to it from the National Immigrant Justice Center. Serrano helps translate client information into English.

"The language barrier can pose some obstacles for our attorneys and clients who are sharing very personal and traumatic experiences," she explains. "It is crucial to establish trust and confidence. When the future of our clients is in our hands, it becomes extremely important to make sure that the barriers of communication do not hinder that process and that all our clients are afforded all the rights and protection that our legal system provides."

Additionally, Serrano volunteers for other pro bono efforts including work for the Center for Disability and Elder Law. Recently, she worked on a project to help seniors with tax issues. The project helped alert many whose homes were at risk due to arrears in their property taxes.

One of her nominators for the award, Margaret Benson, Executive Director of Chicago Volunteer Legal Services, said Serrano is often the first point of contact for clients and that she is vital in establishing trust between client and attorney. Her cases have included work on an

international child abduction case, helping an aunt win custody of her abandoned nieces and nephews, and assisting an ill grandmother in protecting and providing for her young grandson in the event of her death.

Regarding her own law firm, Serrano said, "I have also always promoted integrating our firm's summer associate program with our pro bono work. I truly believe that by exposing our young attorneys at an early stage to pro bono work, they will likely continue this work throughout their careers.

"It is an honor to work for a firm that truly believes it has an obligation to help the community. It does not matter if you are a partner at a firm, a simple paralegal, or a human being with compassion in your heart, we all have the power to make a difference and lend a helping hand," she said.

Benson wrote, "Legal aid programs need people like Bertha—people who embrace our system of justice and encourage others to make use of it. This is particularly true in immigrant communities where too many fear and avoid the American legal system.

"Bertha's volunteer work, done with joy and passion, is exactly what the Liberty Bell Award is meant to recognize," she said.

Serrano holds a bachelors degree in Criminal Justice from The University of Illinois at Chicago and earned her paralegal certificate from Roosevelt University in 2003.

About the Award

The Liberty Bell Award promotes the ideals of justice, liberty, and the importance of individual and community responsibility and is bestowed on honorees who have met the following qualifications:

- a) they must not be lawyers;
- b) they must have a sense of responsibility for community welfare and public duty under the law;
- c) they must help others to understand and assert their rights under the law;
- d) they must promote and encourage respect for and obedience to the law;
and
- e) they must assist the smooth functioning of our system of justice.

The Liberty Bell Award winner will be presented with a commemorative plaque by Hon. James P. Flannery Jr. of the Circuit Court of Cook County at the Judges' Reception which includes cocktails and appetizers. To RSVP for the complimentary event, call 312-554-2032 or email yls@chicagobar.org. Space is limited.

