



ILLINOIS STATE
BAR ASSOCIATION

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE, June 2008

Homewood Attorney to Receive Award for Battling Bias

Homewood attorney William J. Borah, an activist for eliminating discrimination based on sexual orientation, will receive the 2008 Community Leadership Award from the Illinois State Bar Association (ISBA) on Friday, June 27, during the organization's 132nd Annual Meeting in St. Louis.

Given by the ISBA's Committee on Sexual Orientation and Gender Identity (SOGI), the honor recognizes individuals for efforts to foster understanding of lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender people and their issues of concern.

One of the first members of the SOGI Committee, Borah also has served on the ISBA Assembly. He is a member of the Federal Civil Practice Section Council and past chair of the Labor and Employment Law Section Council.

His first practice after graduation from the University of Memphis Law School was with East Arkansas Legal Services, litigating civil rights for impoverished African-Americans. He was laid off in 1984, when the federal legal services budget was slashed.

Borah relocated to Alaska and joined a litigation firm in civil rights and employment law. He contested constitutionality of a statute relating to good-time credit for city prisoners comparable to state prisoners.

Returning to Illinois in 1987, Borah soon became active in the South Suburban Bar Association (SSBA) and directed its pro bono program, and in 1992, he received the organization's President's Award. He also received an ISBA pro bono service honorable mention.

Becoming SSBA president in 1996, he coordinated an effort to expand suburban jurisdiction and, specifically, to keep paternity jurisdiction from leaving the 6th Municipal District.

During this time, Borah's firm began working with AIDS victims in the Chicago area, going to homes and apartments to draft and execute wills and powers of attorney. He was a pro bono volunteer through Bonaventure House for several organizations.

The Howard Brown Medical Center named him Volunteer of the Year in 1995 and 1996, and he was invited to join the board of the Greater Chicago Committee in assisting HIV and AIDS-impacted African-Americans.

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As an ISBA Assembly member in 2001, Borah helped guide the debate and successful vote to endorse House Bill 101, a sexual orientation amendment to the Illinois Human Rights Act.

His involvement in a case against a school district for lack of intervention to protect two gay students earned him recognition from the Gay, Lesbian and Straight Teachers Network for Outstanding Work Toward Ending Homophobia in the Schools.

In 2005, Borah saved a veteran teacher from being fired when a superintendent suspected he was gay, and in 2006, he obtained a remedy for a transsexual when a school agreed to acknowledge her new name.

The 35,000-member ISBA, with offices in Springfield and Chicago, provides professional services to Illinois lawyers, and education and services to the public.

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