

THE BARRISTERS' ASSOCIATION OF PHILADELPHIA
Dr. MARTIN LUTHER KING, JR. ANNUAL MEMORIAL BREAKFAST
ACCEPTANCE OF OUTSTANDING SERVICE TO THE COMMUNITY AWARD
JANUARY 19, 2015

Thank you Dean Epps for your generous introductions. Thank you, too, to the Barristers for this award, especially to our former board member, current advisory board member and my friend Monique Myatt Galloway. And congratulations to all of the other awardees. This is an impressive group and I am proud to be among you.

I am the person in front of you, but this is an award for the entire community that is the Public Interest Law Center of Philadelphia. There are the past and present board and advisory board members who include Dean Epps and Kevin Hardin, an officer of the Barristers. But most of all we are the talented, committed and hard-working staff. These are people who are always pushing—our elected leaders to live up to the promises of our laws and constitutions. When the laws don't work or aren't enough, they propose new ones, or help visionary leaders get their ideas enacted. They push me, to see the challenges outside my office and experience, to take unpopular positions. And they push themselves, always, to know when things are not ok and need to be fixed. I ask the staff to please stand and be recognized.

When we think about Dr. Martin Luther King, and why he inspires us—it comes back to his brilliance in orchestrating a movement. The most vivid reminder is Ava Duvernay's Selma, a film that gives us a snapshot of the terror, horror and magnificent courage that led to the birth of the Voting Rights Act of 1965.

But the reality is that Dr. King's movement was never linear. Each success was followed by backpedalling. We see the peaks and valleys today. The killing of young black men by law enforcement officials without penalty legal consequence continues. We have a public education system that fails children, and in particular expends fewer dollars for children of color. We have states restricting the right to vote with impunity (happily, for the moment, not here).

What are we to do. We are only lawyers. We do not want to be arrested. Violence rightly appalls us. I say, resolve to take one step more. Demand that Philadelphia institutionalize police accountability. Years ago, the Law Center was instrumental in founding the Police Advisory Commission, an independent group designed to investigate claims on police misconduct. Today, the Commission still exists, but it is unfunded and many of its seats are unfilled. That needs to change

Take on public education. Go see your elected officials in Harrisburg and demand that public education become the top priority with a fully funded, fair formula.

Vote. And while you are doing that, call your Congressperson or Senator and ask that they repair the damage done to the Voting Rights Act of 1965 by the United States Supreme Court.

Demonstate. Participate in a rally for school funding, or a die in. Today, after your community service, take part in the demonstration that is scheduled to kick off at noon today at 440 Broad Street.

Whatever it is, take one step more. One step beyond your comfort zone. Put yourself out there. Push yourself.

The truth is that Dr. Martin Luther King's movement was never his movement alone. It took lawyers and judges. It took thousands of people walking out their doors onto the streets to say what they felt. It took the federal government, from the Department of Justice to the federal law enforcement to the President.

It may be true that the moral arc of the universe bends toward justice. That is possible. But what I know to be true is true is that the arc will not bend if we do nothing. It will take a force field of action for that arc to bend. It takes every one of you.

And I promise, if you do take those steps, and if you want or need us, the Public Interest Law Center of Philadelphia will be there with you.

Thank you very much for this great honor.