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AMERICAN CIVIL LIBERTIES UNION

Iowa

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Melissa Hasso Wins the 2018 Dan Johnston Cooperating Attorney Award

Des Moines, Iowa — Melissa C. Hasso, partner with the Sherinian & Hasso Law Firm in Des Moines, has been selected to receive the 2018 Dan Johnston Cooperating Attorney Award. The Dan Johnston Award is an annual award that honors those who make sustained and extraordinary contributions to civil liberties through their work as ACLU of Iowa volunteer attorneys.

Hasso has been working with the ACLU of Iowa to represent Jesse Vroegh, a man who is transgender, in his civil rights case against the State of Iowa, his former employer. Vroegh, who worked as a nurse, was denied the use of the men's restrooms and locker rooms at work, as well as medical coverage for gender confirmation surgical care under his employer-sponsored insurance plan. That case is ongoing and is currently set for trial in early 2019.

Hasso's efforts have been vital to the advocacy of the ACLU of Iowa in other ways as well. In her role as chair of the Iowa chapter of the National Employment Lawyer's Association, Hasso has been instrumental in partnering with the ACLU to advance legislation that would protect pregnant women from workplace discrimination by requiring employers provide them with reasonable accommodations — simple, common sense things like extra bathroom breaks, a stool to sit on when checking out customers, or the ability to carry a water bottle even though it may deviate from a standard uniform.

Hasso has also volunteered to assist in the ACLU and its immigrants' rights partners in providing first-responder type pro bono assistance to immigrants in detention.

Also, Hasso serves as a member of the ACLU of Iowa Legal Committee and assisting in case evaluation and development. Legal Committee members also assist the ACLU by lending the benefit of their years of experience and expertise as litigators. For example, as an expert trial lawyer, Hasso's consultation proved invaluable for the ACLU and Planned Parenthood attorneys in their successful litigation to stop the abortion law that would have required a second, medically unnecessary clinic visit followed by a 72-hour waiting period.

Rita Bettis Austen, ACLU of Iowa legal director, said, "Melissa Hasso is incredibly deserving of this award. We are so lucky to have her as a part of our ACLU family through her participation

on the Legal Committee and even more vitally, through her serving as co-counsel with me along with the national ACLU LGBT Project in litigating the Vroegh case.”

“Her willingness to volunteer her formidable trial skills and substantive legal expertise has enabled us to bring this groundbreaking employment discrimination case on behalf of Mr. Vroegh. And like Dan Johnston, for whom this award was named, Melissa doesn’t shy away from important justice issues just because they haven’t been done before. She brings a spirit of creativity and enormous energy to her work with us on these important issues of fairness and equality.”

The Dan Johnston Cooperating Attorney Award is named in memorial of the long-time Des Moines and Washington attorney. As his first lawsuit fresh out of Drake Law School in the late 1960s, Dan represented the Tinker family in their landmark free speech lawsuit against the Des Moines Schools in front of the U.S. Supreme Court. He went on to a distinguished legal career, fighting for the fundamental rights of all Americans. Mr. Johnston passed away in 2016, and the first award in his honor was given in 2017.

ACLU volunteer attorneys are essential to the work the ACLU does. The ACLU’s staff and funding is limited, so the success of our legal program depends greatly on the generous participation of our volunteer attorneys from around the state, who volunteer their time, expertise, advice, and resources.

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The ACLU of Iowa is a private, non-partisan organization that fights to advance civil liberties for all. It is the state affiliate of the national American Civil Liberties Union. The ACLU prides itself in upholding everyone’s civil liberties, no matter who they are or what they believe. We work to assure the rights of all Iowans – from atheists to devout Christians, from labor unions to businesspeople and more – to make sure the constitutional rights of all are preserved. For more information, please go to www.aclu-ia.org.