



WASHINGTON LAWYERS' COMMITTEE
FOR CIVIL RIGHTS & URBAN AFFAIRS

For Immediate Release

Equal Rights Center Receives the Prestigious 2008 Alfred McKenzie Award

WASHINGTON, D.C., June 4, 2008 – The Equal Rights Center (ERC) was honored today by the Washington Lawyers' Committee for Civil Rights & Urban Affairs' (WLC) presentation of the esteemed 2008 Alfred McKenzie Award.

“The Alfred McKenzie Award goes to clients whose dedication and courage have produced civil rights victories of particular significance,” said Roderic V.O. Boggs, the Executive Director of the WLC. “Without question, the ERC is just such a client.”

Past recipients of the WLC's McKenzie Award include the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP), the National Urban League, Washington Urban League and Congresswoman Eleanor Holmes Norton (D-DC), Boggs said.

The award, established in 1994, is named for Alfred McKenzie a long-time Washington figure. During World War II, McKenzie left his entry-level position in the Government Printing Office (GPO) to join the Army Air Corps where he served with distinction as one of the famed Tuskegee Airmen. Returning to the GPO in 1946, McKenzie was assigned to the same low-level position he had held before his military service. He began to see fellow employees who were white and with less service time receive promotions. The discrimination was obvious. At that point he then began a career-long struggle to win fair employment treatment for all African American GPO employees.

“Alfred McKenzie represents courage of the first order. He put his life and reputation on the line in World War II and later in Washington, D.C.,” said Rabbi Bruce E. Kahn, Executive Director of the Equal Rights Center. “The principles of freedom, equality and justice for which he fought overseas then guided him after the war through his long fight against the dehumanizing and entrenched policies and practices of the U.S. Government Printing Office.”

In 1972, along with the WLC and the law firm Hogan & Hartson, McKenzie initiated a class action lawsuit to challenge racial discrimination against African-American pressmen at the GPO. In 1987, McKenzie's determination led to a landmark legal victory securing a multi-million dollar fund to reimburse hundreds of African-American workers who were victims of employment discrimination, and even more importantly, restructuring of GPO personnel policies that opened the door of equal opportunity to countless other workers.

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“For 40 years the Washington Lawyers’ Committee has been committed to the same principles that so clearly led and emboldened Alfred McKenzie,” said Kahn. “That the Committee now elevates the Equal Rights Center into association with such achievements bestows upon us the highest possible honor, an honor that will humble and inspire us every day until the need for the Equal Rights Center no longer exists. It is especially meaningful and hopeful that we received this award on the same day that every news outlet in America reported that an African American with the strongly ethnic name of Barack Obama clinched the Democratic Party’s nomination for President of the United States.”

The ERC is a non-profit civil rights organization. This year the ERC is celebrating 25 years of protecting civil rights. Originally established in 1983 as the Fair Housing Council of Greater Washington, the ERC focused on educating and counseling the public on all forms of discrimination in housing. The ERC is a private, not-for-profit, civil rights agency that is the product of mergers with the Fair Employment Council of Greater Washington in 1999 and the Disability Rights Council in 2005. The ERC is dedicated to identifying, challenging, and eliminating discrimination in housing, employment, public accommodations, and government services through education, research, testing, counseling, enforcement and advocacy. For more information please go to www.equalrightscenter.org or call the Equal Rights Center at 202.234.3062.

The Washington Lawyers’ Committee for Civil Rights and Urban Affairs was established in 1968 to provide pro bono legal services to address issues of discrimination and entrenched poverty. Since its founding, the Committee has handled more than 5,000 cases on behalf of individuals and advocacy organizations in the areas of equal employment, fair housing, public accommodations, public education, asylum and refugee rights, and disability rights. For more information about the Committee, see www.washlaw.org. The Committee can be reached at 202.319.1000.

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